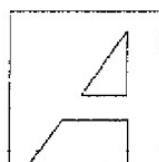


# Middle Class Values in India and Western Europe

*Edited by*  
Imtiaz Ahmad  
and  
Helmut Reifeld



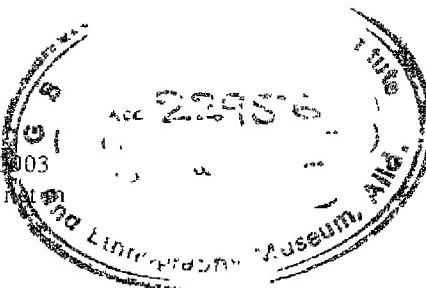
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## Preface

• Helmut Reifeld

Early in 2001 the columns of *The Hindu* appeared to be a battlefield for bashing the Indian middle class. Hanish Khare for instance, summarized his critique of the Constitution Review Commission under the title: 'Stop this middle class mischief' (*The Hindu*, 10.1.2001). Two weeks later, C. B. Rau related his discussion of India's software success needs to the software value chain of the Indian middle class under an international perspective: 'The middle class of India', he states, 'has acquired mythical, if not mystical proportions... It is increasingly propelled by its own agenda, driven by its own momentum and defined by its own demands' (*The Hindu*, 23.1.2001). In his view, the morality of the Indian middle class has become a common state of mind, a moral mirror and a compass of culture... (which) leads to a mindset of mediocrity'. As compared to the West, he concludes, 'our lust for economic liberalization is destabilising the moral compass of our middle class.'

Shortly afterwards, a more balanced view was presented by Andre Beteille. He indicated that the Indian middle class can be regarded as 'the most polymorphous middle class in the world' (*The Hindu*, 5.2.2001). In contrast to C. B. Rau he emphasized, however, that the middle class in India 'has played a leading part in the modernization of Indian society, without it there would be no modernization'. Béteille was supported by P. V. Indiresan, also defending the new middle class in India (*The Hindu*, 20.2.2001). For Indiresan, too many stereotypes are dominating the ongoing criticisms and the frequent moral outrages

In his final attempt to evaluate the importance of the new Indian middle class, contrasting it to the upper as well as to the lower classes he could have referred to the famous quotation by Aristotle, saying that the perfect political community is one in which the middle class is in control, and outnumbers both the other classes. Nevertheless he comes to a similar conclusion 'Why is the middle class the best? Because it criticises itself all the time, corrects itself, and thereby reforms society; the others do not take that trouble'

Apparently, the rise of a new middle class is one of the outstanding features of the economic, social and political developments in India in the 1990s. Like in other parts of the world, the middle class as a social institution can be regarded as the driving force for the development of a state and its society. Changes as well as the stability of middle class values, therefore, have always found much attention. But any understanding of these changes requires knowledge about the former status quo, about the conditions and about the context of change. In this regard, a comparative perspective is often helpful and sometimes even necessary.

It doesn't need more emphasis, that a workshop on 'Middle Class Values in India and Western Europe' carries sufficient importance in itself and offers particular scope for a comparative and intercultural dialogue. This workshop was initiated and organized by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Germany, and held at Neemrana Fort Palace (Rajasthan) between 7–10 March 2001. It was part of a series of workshops focused on India in a programme called 'Dialogue on Values'. While the focus of attention lies on establishing a common platform for dialogue between the different cultures involved, the dynamic component is supposed to be the link between the static and changing elements of the respective societies and problems, so that the contributions provide an adequate help for the understanding of contemporary controversies. This in particular was the case in the workshop on 'middle class values', where many new questions were raised and discussed from a comparative perspective.

The essays in this book emanated from the common interest among the participants to find a common dialogue in the areas of middle-class related values. In order to be fruitful, such a dialogue had to be based on a mutual consensus of interest in the dialogue itself. By its very nature it had to be a process where one did not merely state and restate one's final conclusions but was willing to negotiate the differences in the points of view. Thus, the opinions and judgements expressed in the following articles are those of the individual authors.

and not of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation or of any Indian organisation. The articles in this book were written with the idea to promote and carry the discourse forward rather than end it with a final statement. The present book not only provides some useful information about South Asia as compared with Western Europe but also hopes to contribute to the process of worldwide dialogue.

Inputs have come from many sides, in the process of preparation as well as of publication, and it is impossible to name them all. Our first gratitude, however, goes to those, who not only presented a paper and participated in the discussion, but also made the effort to revise their papers. Their effort is reflected in this book. We are also grateful to Professor Imtiaz Ahmad whose patience and constant readiness to re-structure the programme, to smoothen worries, and also always to know the right person, was indispensable for the outcome. For the implementation of the workshop the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is particularly proud of the collaboration with and grateful to the Foundation Maison des Sciences de L'Homme in Paris which contributed the airfares for two French experts. Last, but certainly not the least we would like to thank Esha Béteille from Social Science Press, for her charming and firm way of handling the problems of publication. With their mainly 'invisible' efforts, Manu and Mohita have constantly worked behind the scene. Without the help, imagination and friendship of all mentioned this book would never have come out.

New Delhi, October 2001

HUMA REHMAN

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## Introduction

• Imitaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld

The origin of the middle class as a social category has a long history. At least, one has to go back to the emergence of the 'burgher' in the towns of Central and Western Europe in the course of the Middle Ages. They formed a separate social, legal and functional category somewhere between the aristocracy on the one hand and the lower, working classes on the other. As they never formed a homogeneous group but rather differed from time to time as well as from place to place it generally seems more appropriate to talk about 'middle classes' in the plural form rather than in the singular. If we look for a unifying bond, however, it can probably be found in their value system: their search for independence and individual rights, for specific freedom and the protection of their possessions, for a culture of their own and in their respect for individual achievements. Above all, these values were supposed to distinguish them from those above, the aristocracy, as well as from those below. And the more these distinctions materialized, the more the middle classes developed an identity of their own.

The real momentum in the rise of the middle classes and in their formation came with the age of Enlightenment on the one hand and in the course of the Industrial Revolution on the other. It was the exigencies of large-scale mechanical production that heralded a new social order, distinct from feudalism and founded not on bondage but on free relations. This led to an increasing number of groups and social categories, emerging from the expansion of trade and industry and professions that added to the complexity of social structure. Finally

the rise of capitalism made the middle classes an integral part of a unitary social order. Unlike in pre- and early modern times, priority was not given to legal aspects any longer but to social integration. The middle class implied not simply that those constituting this class stood between the aristocracy and the workers. There were two other features that defined the middle class. First, the middle class constituted a composite intermediate layer consisting of a wide range of occupational interests but bound together by a common style of living and behaviour pattern. Second, the middle class stood for certain liberal, democratic values, which it expressed in its social and political conduct, but did not always pursue them with the fullest possible commitment. Ideologically, the new social order dominated in large part by the salience of the middle class stood for intellectual freedom and social mobility, liberal individualism and political democracy. A middle-class society thus became identified with a stratified social order representing a new standard of values which its members imposed upon the entire societies in which they lived.

This book is concerned with a comparative exploration of middle-class values in India and Western Europe. Even if only Germany and France are actually examined, other European countries were indeed considered in the discussions that followed the presentation of papers at the workshop, out of which this book has emerged. Widening the scope of the subject, however, also introduces problems of terminology. In England and North America, for instance, the term 'middle class' is rarely used when the role of businessmen, professionals or civil servants is discussed. These are regarded as the 'élite', the 'rich' or sometimes even the 'upper class', while in Western Europe, at the same time, they would form the core-group of the middle classes. In England, for instance, the role of the 'gentry' would deserve a separate discussion. But even on the European Continent, it is often easier to identify those who do not belong to the category of the middle class, above all the aristocracy, but also the Catholic clergy, the farmers, the lower groups of the society and especially the working classes.

Following an elaboration of the conceptual problems inherent in a discussion of the middle class, three papers deal with its historical evolution in Germany and India and an equal number of papers focus on its contemporary features, defined either in terms of consumption patterns, social values or access to educational opportunities. The remaining papers deal with the different aspects of middle-class values in India. The themes considered are the political orientations of the middle class in India, its formation among socially deprived groups

and its attitudes towards women as well as the poor. Taken together, these papers do not exhaust the discussion of middle-class values, but they provide substantive comparative insights for future exploration. The importance of this book lies in its attempt to address the issue of middle-class values in an informed and comparative framework which cuts across different countries with varied historical evolution.

## EVOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN EUROPE

In modern history, the term 'middle class' has generally been used to denote those sections of the society which lie between the aristocracy and the working classes. The definition of the term has been undergoing subtle change over at least two hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when the Rev. Thomas Gisborne first employed the term in 1785, he used it to refer to the propertied and largely entrepreneurial class located between landowners on the one hand and the urban industrial workers and agricultural labourers on the other. Since then with the transformation of the industrial system of production from the early stage at which ownership of capital was combined with management of enterprise, to the present day rise of giant business corporations in which ownership of property has come to be almost completely separated from the management of the business that is getting increasingly professionalized. In this context, middle class has come, more and more, to include the professional 'white collar or service' class. This class is demarcated from the other two classes aristocracy at the top and the manual unskilled and semi-skilled worker at the bottom. This class which has a positive self-image qualifies the other two classes negatively. The upper crust of this class (middle class) would comprise higher grade professionals, the self employed, higher grade administrators, officials and even managers. At the other end of the wide spectrum of the 'service' class would lie the white collar office workers who have shorter hours, greater job security, better fringe benefits and wider opportunities for promotion.

The evolution of the middle classes in Europe, during what has often been called the 'long nineteenth century', i.e. between the French Revolution of 1789 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914,

<sup>1</sup>P N Stearns, 'The Middle Class Toward a Precise Definition', in *Comparative Studies in Sociology and History*, vol. 21, 1979, p. 377-96. P M Pilbeam, *The Middle Classes in Europe 1789-1914. France, Germany, Italy and Russia*, Hounds-mill Bas ngstoke 1990.

is one of the most characteristic features of this period. Middle class character is not merely a descriptive adjective, but rather defines a distinctive section of the population. Even though this section has never comprised a coherent unit but has been more of a heterogeneous group it can still be clearly distinguished from other sections of the society. The middle class left a strong impact on society from the classic bourgeois age of the nineteenth century to the present day. The twentieth century has experienced rapid advances in science and technology, a management revolution in the conduct of business and industry, rise of state planning and growing government intervention in the operation of the market forces, widespread fervour for democracy and egalitarianism, growing sex equality and entry of women in the professions that had led to the multiplication of experts, specialists and service personnel of all types. This meant that the middle classes not only grew in number but became enormously heterogeneous and diverse as well.

That the social transformation of Europe from feudalism to the modern age was the work of the middle class is recognized even by Marx who otherwise insisted on the two-class theoretical model. In their historical writings on contemporary events in Europe, Marx and Engels repeatedly refer to the leading role of the middle class in the rise of the modern system of steam manufactures and steam communications and crushing of every economical and political obstacle which delayed or hindered the development of that system. Likewise, in the political field they acknowledged candidly that the middle class, 'that enlightened and liberal class which founded the British empire was also responsible for the establishment of British liberty, reform of parliament and extension of the democratic principles, reduction of taxation and repeal of Corn Laws. All the great revolutions in modern Europe, from the Reformation to the translation of the democratic ideals of individual freedom, civil liberties, secularism, and representative forms of government were the result of the various struggles waged and led by the middle class for the emancipation of civil society.'

## MIDDLE CLASSES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

By the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'middle class' already covered a wide range of people.<sup>2</sup> What mainly distinguished them from

<sup>2</sup>Jürgen Kocka (ed.) *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert vor 1. Erhebung und Verfa-*

other sections of the population—at least in their self-perception—were their skills and competence, their possessions and influence, and above all the role they played for the stability of the nation. Some of them rose from among the skilled labourers and smaller merchants others descended from the aristocracy or the landowners. Most of them however, were entrepreneurs or leading governmental administrators and the one thing which was found most characteristic—not only in their own eyes—was their high level of education.

In the course of the twentieth century, the middle classes in Western Europe which varied from nation to nation underwent further transformations which were profound.<sup>3</sup> Many of the differences between them lay in their attitude to modernization, their degree of liberalism, their emphasis on education, their impact on economic development and especially their reaction to the rise of fascism in all parts of Western Europe. During the early decades of the twentieth century, a time which has been called the 'era of ideologies',<sup>4</sup> the middle classes and bourgeois societies in Europe were permeated with ideological controversies. Facing the wave of totalitarian regimes what was the role the 'Burgertum' in Germany, the 'société civile' in France and the 'civil society' in Britain originally played?<sup>5</sup>

It was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that comparative studies of middle-class values were taken up systematically. A striking example is the discussion on the origins of National Socialism in Germany. In fact, it had been this controversy about a 'separate course of German history' (*deutscher Sonderweg*), meaning separate from that of its Western neighbours, which had led to the increased interest in the evolution of the middle classes in Western Europe. Although the middle classes in Europe cannot be charged for being responsible for the rise of fascism, for instance in Germany and Italy, why was it then, that their reactions clearly differed? Had the rise of nationalism been 'delayed'<sup>6</sup> in Germany and Italy? Was the middle

Furopas, vol. II Wirtschaftsbürger und Bildungsbürger, vol. III. Verburgerlichung, Recht und Politik, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995

<sup>3</sup>Peter Lundgreen (ed.), Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Burgherrn, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2000

<sup>4</sup>Karl Dietrich Bracher, Zeit der Ideologien. Eine Geschichte politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1982

<sup>5</sup>Gérard Noiriel, Der Staatsbürger, in Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds), Der Mensch des 19. Jahrhunderts, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt 1999 p. 201–27

<sup>6</sup>This controversy was provoked through the book by Helmut Plessner Die

class in Germany more receptive to (or less repulsed by) fascist ideology than its neighbouring Western European countries, for instance France, The Netherlands, Switzerland etc? Was the middle class in Germany less liberal, less politically 'modernised' and deficient in its value system?

Comparative research offered many new answers and explanations to these questions. A closer look at the role of the middle classes in France and Britain (the two countries which always found the greatest attention in this regard) made it more difficult to attribute to them a profound influence on the political stability of their countries. But if they cannot be regarded as being less feudal and more constitutionalized, why then should they be seen as less amenable to the rise of fascism? Comparative studies which also looked at other European or even outer European countries reveal a similar picture. In most cases, these similarities relate to culture, the imitation of the aristocracy or the distance kept towards the lower classes. The idea of a 'normal' evolution of nations and their respective middle classes turned out to be more and more fragile.

After the destructive period of the First and Second World Wars—which Raymond Aron once had called the new 'Thirty Years War'—the democratic minded elements of the middle class re-appeared in Germany like the Phoenix out of the ashes. They had not passed away as many expected, but had shown, over the period of time, an impressive degree of continuity. They were mainly citizens from the middle class who re-established, for instance, the important domain of local self-governance. Here, like in other areas of social, political and cultural life they did not stick to former traditions but turned out to be innovative and influential. In the 1950s, middle class perceptions of family life, for example, spread over most parts of the society, and on the political level a highly qualified and professional bureaucracy exercised its capability to implement reform from above.

After 1945, the middle class in the Federal Republic of Germany achieved what they had not achieved earlier in the old Reich: the dominant role in public life and a supreme role in political decision making. Middle-class values had become more popular than ever before and the public sphere was what many Liberals in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had dreamt of: a social market economy within the framework of a liberal Constitution. At the same time, however,

life in the eastern part of Germany, the German Democratic Republic was quite the opposite. There, any kind of middle-class values were declared as bourgeois relics from a former age which the population was forced to overcome. Even in the West, the new generation of the 1960s looked upon the post-war period as a restoration of out-dated values. This perception not only led to the student's revolt of 1968, but—in its aftermath—to a far-reaching re-structuring of social life and a successive levelling out of middle-class values.

### EVOLUTION OF MIDDLE CLASS IN INDIA

Misra has argued in his seminal work on the middle classes in India that institutions conducive to capitalist growth were not lacking in India before the British rule. Indian artisan industry and occupational specialization were highly developed. There existed in addition a separate class of merchants. They were organized in guilds designed to regulate prices and to protect trading rights against the interference of royal officials and landed magnates. Even a money economy had developed in India at an early stage of history, and the coining of money was a royal privilege held by certain private families of traders specializing in currency. Yet, as Max Weber noted, 'modern capitalism did not develop indigenously before or during the English rule. It was taken over as a finished artefact without autonomous beginnings'.<sup>7</sup> Misra goes on to argue that the political and social systems were to a large extent responsible for this. The royal officials and priesthood often combined against the bourgeois plutocrats. 'It is', he writes, 'that such combinations were not peculiar to India, they occurred also in the West. But in the West the mercantile control of municipal governments, especially of the police, rendered them ineffectual. The guild power in India remained purely money power, unsupported by any authority of a political or military nature. It collapsed as soon as the king found it convenient to call in the aid of priestly and knightly elements'.<sup>8</sup> Later, Misra goes on to conclude, 'In spite of the potential of a middle class bourgeois development, therefore, the immobility of the caste organization and the despotism of bureaucracy precluded such a development'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Max Weber, *Religion of India*, The Free Press, New York, 1958, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, Bombay 1961, p. 8.

British rule produced a revolution in social relations and class structure in India. A class of intermediaries emerged, that served as a link between the people and the new rulers. This was the middle class that continued to grow in strength and prosperity with the progress of foreign rule. The stage in the creation of this class was set with the establishment of trading relations followed by the rule of the British East India Company. The trading communities provided the nucleus. *Baniyas* and *gomastas* were appointed by the company, from among the Indians, to do their trading. With the acquisition of the Diwani of Bengal in 1765, the East India Company became the ruling power in that part of the country and went on over the next eighty years extending its rule bit by bit until it annexed the Punjab in 1857. The revolt of 1857, which was led by the old élite that had lost power because of British conquest, brought in the direct rule of Britain. This also marked the end of the old elite and its replacement by a new one constituted by the newly emergent middle class.

It was only after the advent of British rule in India that the ideas and institutions of a middle class social order were imported to India. Further, the British attempted as part of their educational policy to create a class comparable to their own, so that it may assist them in the administration of the country.<sup>10</sup> They aimed at creating a middle class which was to be a class of imitators and not the originators of new values and methods. The educated class that emerged in India as a result of the British educational policies cared more for position and influence in the civil service than for mass education or economic development. Thus, from the circumstances of their origin and growth, the members of the educated class, such as government servants, lawyers, college teachers and doctors constituted the bulk of the Indian middle class. This middle class was largely dominated by the traditional higher castes.<sup>11</sup>

In its formation and the role played in history, the Indian middle class bore close resemblance, at least in some senses, to its European counterpart. The latter had its origin in the opportunities of trade thrown up by the discovery of the New World and the East by Columbus and Vasco de Gama respectively in the closing decade of the fifteenth century. The enterprising among them, who had the necessary experience and ability, seized the opportunities thus afforded and risked all they had in their bid to amass individual fortunes. In

<sup>10</sup> Misra, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Pavan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, Viking, Delhi 1998, p. 27.

course of time, the early merchants-adventurers became instruments in heralding the industrial revolution, which was as much a product of the new spirit of enterprise that swept Europe on account of the emergence of the middle class as of the spate of inventions in the technological field in the eighteenth century in Britain and later in the nineteenth century, in other parts of Europe.

The Indian middle class had similar beginnings. It arose out of the enterprising Indians rising to the occasion and responding energetically to the new opportunities of making money and amassing riches thrown up by the Europeans entering into the export trade in the country. The European traders in the first instance came to India for the purpose of buying Indian manufactures for sale in the European markets. As they did not know the language, manners and customs of the people in India, they had to depend on the services of the Indian middlemen who became their contacts, agents and interpreters, moneychangers and financiers. These middlemen provided the nucleus for the formation of the middle class. Like their counterparts in Europe earlier, some of the entrants to commercial activity, either as agents or independently in the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, amassed great wealth and acquired social status far beyond what they could aspire to have in the structure of economic relations in the traditional society.

However, the resemblance between the middle class in Europe and in India ended at this point. While the European middle class was independent, the Indian middle class was under foreign rule. After exhausting the opportunity for investment and employment in the commercial field the European middle class, at least in Britain, turned to the industrial field. On being denied that opportunity, because India was now a colonial country, the Indian middle class turned to the construction of houses and commercial buildings in metropolitan cities and the accumulation of precious metals. It was prevented by the compulsions of foreign rule from transforming itself into an industrial bourgeoisie and its members had to remain content by engaging themselves in commercial activity or the acquisition of real estate which yielded real income. In the political field also, the European and the Indian, middle classes played different roles because of the divergent circumstances in which the two had to operate. The national bourgeoisie first aligned itself with the monarch to destroy the power of the feudal lords and then through political processes assumed the role of the ruling class.

The establishment of democratic forms of government helped to

separate the capitalist sections of the bourgeoisie from the political functionaries of the state. The latter, as people's representatives in parliament and public servants, came to constitute the ruling class or the political élite. In India, on the other hand, since the middle class owed its origin and prosperity to European commercial enterprise it helped in the first phase of its evolution, in the establishment of British power and promotion of European commerce and enterprise in India. It was only after the 'Mutiny' that it began to assume the political role of competitor for power with the British. At first, this role was of modest dimensions and limited to giving expression to people's thoughts, needs and grievances through writing petitions, letters and press articles. As time went on, the competitor role, adopted by an important section of the middle class came to dominate over that of a collaborator and this continued till the very end of the Raj. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian middle class had come to pose a serious challenge to the continuance of British power. It was instrumental in arousing national consciousness and giving a sense of political unity as a nation to the people.

### MIDDLE CLASS VALUES IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Outlining the importance of the middle class is not the same as understanding it as an analytic category. 'Despite the crucial importance of the social group', Sanjay Joshi argues, 'Indian historiography has more or less ignored the middle class in recent years. Scholars of the 1950s and 1960s did use the term extensively but for most part assumed the middle class to be a self-evident sociological category which did not need further explanation'.<sup>12</sup> In his perceptive study of the making of the middle class in colonial India, Joshi explains why traditional sociological indicators of income and occupation cannot take us very far in understanding the category of the middle class. Though the economic background of the middle class was important, the power and constitution of the middle class in India was based not on the economic power it wielded, which was minimal, but on the ability of its members to be cultural entrepreneurs. 'Being middle class was primarily a project of self fashioning'.<sup>13</sup> The middle class in India was constituted not so much by its social or economic standing

<sup>12</sup>Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001, p. 4

<sup>13</sup>Joshi, p. 2.

as by its public sphere politics. The definition and power of the middle class came from its propagation of modern ways of life. Modernity in this sense, represents more than a fixed set of indicators regarding patterns of economic organization, social relations, or even a single set of cultural issues. Joshi writes 'Much of the power of this group of men, and later women, who fashioned themselves as the middle class, came from their claim to emulate an ideal-typical modernity first appropriated by their counterparts in the West. But the Indian modernity they constructed had also to be different'<sup>14</sup>

Any discussion on the contemporary Indian middle class has to take account of its colonial origins and the changes that have occurred during the last century and a half in its social origins, composition and the role and orientations of this class. Like in Europe, this class (stratum would perhaps be more appropriate) has never been homogeneous. It would include top policy makers (civil servants), middle level bureaucrats, and the petty clerks, school teachers in the mofussil, professionals and corporate executives.

In the colonial period, Western education and the rise of the new modern professions was crucial in characterizing the middle class. The role of this class in the running of the colonial administration and the role that leading sections of this class/stratum played in shaping the orientation of the national movement cannot be overlooked in discussing the middle class in the post-independence period. Besides the varied streams of political or ideological articulation which corresponded both to diverse social origins and divergent visions of the new independent India cannot be overlooked. For example, the dominant stream of the secular, nationalist movement, the Hindu revivalist movements, social reform movements both among the Hindus and Muslims, and the non-Brahmin movements of the South. The diverse ways in which these streams engaged with the colonial encounter, and the extent to which they drew on indigenous religio-cultural sources also varied. All these factors are important in analysing the social, ideological and cultural moorings of this section in the post-independence period. The political-ideological consensus that emerged in the national movement was not without its faultlines. The serious political consequence of it led to the partition of the country.

An important feature of the new, western-educated sections during the colonial period is that they were by and large upper-caste, and

<sup>14</sup>Josh p 2

predominantly Hindu. In the post-independence period, the consensus that had emerged in the dominant sections of the national movement (dominated by the Congress) meant the new state initiated certain measures towards the democratization of a hierarchical, caste-dominated Indian society. Thus the policy of reservations for the scheduled castes and tribes and other weaker sections was an important part of this consensus. This led to a loosening of the hold of the upper-caste sections over the administration, particularly at the lower levels. The measures initiated to weaken the hold of feudal elements over land (the Zamindari abolition, various tenancy legislations) meant that certain sections of the Sudra castes (OBCs) experienced a degree of mobility and some accumulation did take place among these sections. However, their penetration into administration was weak. The main sinews of administration still remained in the hands of the upper castes. More importantly, the state was seen as the principal actor in initiating measures towards the democratization of society and assuring the wherewithal for a life of dignity for Indian citizens.

The movements in the 1950s, 1960s and even the 1970s still largely operated within the framework evolved during the national movement. The deprivation of the large masses of the poor was addressed largely in terms of the state having failed to fulfil its obligations towards its citizens. The language of the movements, whether of the centre or of the left was an inclusive one. Even the radical movements charged the state with having failed to meet the aspirations of the Indian people for a life of equity and social justice. However, the seventies also saw the rise of new social movements which used the language of 'identities', of particularistic identities. They addressed the question of marginalization of the dalits and tribals in their capacity as dalits and tribals. These movements drew attention to the model of development and its biases as well as its failure in addressing the intransigence of structures (caste-based feudal structures) which persisted and contributed to the marginalization of the vast masses of the subaltern groups, castes, classes and ethnicities. It is important to note that in many of these movements, sections of educated people (in the small towns and even in the big cities) played an important and even a leading role.

Two issues that dominated the political and social discourse of the nineties were those of Mandal and Mandir.<sup>15</sup> These two issues in a

<sup>15</sup>Mandal refers to the extension of the principle of affirmative action and reservation in favour of 'intermediate castes' called the Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

sense were symbolic of the deep fissures in Indian society and indicated that the consensus among the middle classes and even the state that characterized the immediate post-independence decades was no longer there. A major section of the upper-caste Hindu middle class gravitated towards Hindu nationalism and even Hindutva. The response to the issue of Mandal was symptomatic of the persistence of the deep caste divides in Indian society. Even the consensus on secularism suffered a setback with the destruction of the Babri Masjid.<sup>1</sup> Indeed these two issues constituted watersheds in the life of the country.

### COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The rapid expansion of a new middle class in India during the last decade of the twentieth century and its increasing influence in many parts of the public sphere constitute one of the most important changes in India's contemporary history. However, this is still an academically unexplored area. How is this middle class characterized and how can it be described? What influence does it exercise and how does it perceive itself? This book is based on the assumption that comparative perspectives might throw light on some of these problems.

The first section 'The Rise of the Old Middle Classes in Europe and India', deals with the subject from a comparative perspective. Margrit Pernau in her paper, 'Middle Class and Secularization: The Muslims of Delhi in the Nineteenth Century', starts with the question of whether secularization (in the sense of a functional differentiation) ever existed amongst Muslims within the South Asian context. Although her focus is on South Asia, this discussion not only raises questions about the significance of religious upbringing in India but also in Western Europe. How can the piety of rising middle classes on either continent be described? In which way did the influence of piousness vary in relation to secularism and which roles did the clergy and preachers play in public life?

Claude Markovits in 'Merchants, Entrepreneurs and the Middle Classes in India in the Twentieth-Century', then tries to explain the rise of the old middle classes in India in the twentieth century. Traders

(OBC) Mandir is the dispute over the Babri mosque in Ayodhya which the right wing forces claimed to be the birthplace of Ram. There was a strong mobilization leading to the demolition of the mosque. On both questions the nineties witnessed massive political mobilization, and its after effects continue to be felt in Indian politics.

and industrialists provide many examples of social integration based on the acceptability of high income. The paper discusses the innumerable regional and caste based differences between the representatives of these two occupational groups in India as well as their gradual mingling with the bureaucracy and politics. Markovits raises the interesting question of how far the character of the old middle class has changed after the independence.

In the third paper of this section, "Bürgerertum" and "Bürgerlichkeit A Class and its Values", by Heinz-Gerhard Haupt concentrates especially on two aspects concerning the middle classes. One is that legislation in the nineteenth century through its various taxes and pensions supported the formation of a class structure. And second, that the existing middle class in Germany preferred to identify itself with a well defined concept of education. This leads to a discussion on the concept of 'self-cultivation' which seems to be associated with quite different associations and expectations for education in South Asia and Western Europe.

The second section, 'Class Formations in the Twentieth-Century' focuses on aspects of education. To begin with, André Béteille, in his paper, 'The Social Character of the Indian Middle Class', discusses the significance of the English-speaking schools in India and how far the entry to universities was formed by the self-understanding of the middle class. He stresses the point that in India before the nineteenth century there were many distinctions between caste, class and kinship relations but that there was no middle class. This was an unique feature from the western point of view and the absence of this middle class is one of the main reasons for the European perception of India as an Oriental society. According to Béteille the growth of the middle classes in India, is essentially a modern phenomena and post nineteenth century. At the same time, Béteille warns us about describing the Indian middle class in comparison to its European counterpart as fundamentally the 'other'. For him, the Indian middle class can be seen as the most polymorphous in the world, and what he would like to see discussed in India is not so much, what the middle class lacks, but what it ultimately wants to distance itself from.

As far as the new Indian middle class is concerned, Pavan Varma, in his paper, 'Middle-Class Values and the Creation of a Civil Society', questions the political influence it may exercise in building up a civil society. That the middle classes have notable social capital is for him beyond dispute. At the same time, however, their low sensitivity *vis-a-vis* social problems and their unwillingness to engage themselves

in society and politics cannot be overlooked. Varma regrets that the new Indian middle class is too preoccupied by individualistic perceptions of salvation, as imbedded in Hinduism. They therefore hardly develop any long term plans for their future, and, often without reflection, imitate the materialistic lifestyle of the West.

In 'The "Grandes Ecoles" in France. From Republican Meritocracy to Noblesse d'Etat', Christian Baudelot describes very critically the importance of the Grandes Écoles for the self-generating maintenance of middle-class values in France. The exclusive role, which the graduates of this elite institution play, up to the present day, in the fields of politics, economics and administration in France, has always evoked admiration, respect and criticism. A similar homogeneous and influential middle class had arisen in India in the first few years after independence.

A different perspective is presented in 'The Changing Social Structure of German Society and the Transformation of German Bourgeois Culture', by Winfried Gebhardt. He explains the societal change and transformation of the middle class in Germany after 1945. The quick development towards a society only interested in pleasure and entertainment ('Spaß- und Erlebnisgesellschaft') and the renunciation of traditional values such as the sense of duty, social responsibility, education and family had gone a far way already. Although, these phenomena are considered as being typically Western, its signs are also evident in India. Gebhardt discusses aspects of the equality of sexes and of the levelling of income differences. He makes an interesting point that criticism of the multicultural society in Western Europe is not automatically an expression of right-wing radicalism.

The focus of the third section, 'Values and Orientations', is on the present value orientation among the middle classes in India. Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar in her paper, 'Middle-Class Formation and the Cultural Construction of Gender in Urban India', presents what she has learnt from her research on young women of the new Indian middle class. This group has shown an astonishing homogeneity, and their image of India at first glance is very uniform. A closer look however, reveals that there exists a great deal of ambivalence in relation to the traditional role of women and also in relation to the new identity of the working woman. Of special interest is the attitude of these young women towards Hinduism, where they are clearly divided between disapproval and sympathy. One point suggested by Poggendorf-Kakar's analysis is that the right wing Hindu ideology to which substantial

sections of the new middle classes are attracted, is striving to reinforce convention or traditional feminine roles. This is in stark contrast to the adoption of a modern lifestyle in other spheres of life. Poggendorff Kakar does not explore this dimension, but her presentation points to the persistence of middle-class hypocrisy when it comes to gender relations.

Gopal Guru presents dalits as an ethnic group within the middle class whose identity is essentially built up through governmental quota politics. As soon as they reach a better social position, however, they try to evade this identity. Of the approximately 160 million dalits in India, about 5 to 10 per cent belong to the middle class. This promotion gives them an opportunity for development, which, on the one hand, makes them perform well, but, on the other hand also leads them to support Hindutva.

The next two essays, 'Changing Political Orientations of the Middle Classes in India' by Zoya Hasan and 'Politics of India's Middle Classes' by Suhas Palshikar, follow up similar questions on a general level. The essays revolve around attitudes towards the ballot, inclinations towards political parties and associations, as well as the current political inclination of the middle classes. Zoya Hasan is concerned with an evaluation of how the process of democratization has enabled erstwhile backward and dalit communities to emerge as a political force in politics. These sections have generally constructed their politics around issues of identity, but the model of politics that they have followed is very substantially patterned on that of the high castes and middle classes. Hasan does not go into the question of whether the democratic struggles carried out by these disadvantaged groups can serve as a bulwark against the rise of right-wing political ideologies to which the general middle classes are substantially drawn. Moreover, what she has to say about the caste-based identity of the OBCs and dalits holds for north India. Elsewhere, particularly in south India, where dalits and non-Brahmin politics started earlier, the contemporary politics of the disadvantaged groups is much less centred on identity issues. It is concerned with economic and social power.

Suhas Palshikar's paper seeks to explain the apparent paradox which is the attraction and inclination of the middle classes towards the right-wing Hindutva ideology. His thesis is that during the 1980s the general middle classes supported Rajiv Gandhi but now the majority of them are supporters of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). Of course, he does not clarify whether this inclination of the middle classes is due to their disenchantment with the policies and politics of the

Congress or whether it is founded on an ideological commitment to the BJP ideology. This is a question that calls for a more detailed reflection. One point that deserves to be made in this connection is that a great deal of what Palshikar suggests with regards to the attraction of the middle classes for the ideology of the BJP relates to north-western India. Whether this situation prevails elsewhere, for example in eastern and southern India, is a moot question that still requires to be explored. Equally, the great variations that exist within the middle classes in terms of inclination towards the right-wing ideology is also something that remains unexplored.

In the final essay, 'Middle-class Values and the Changing Indian Entrepreneur', Gurcharan Das emphasizes the willingness of the new Indian middle class to live up to their flexibility and openness. According to him they are essentially not different from the other similar progressive classes the world over, but are better prepared for the global competition in comparison to the old employers in India. One danger, Das points out, is the clear social and ecological division emerging in India between a relatively prosperous West and a still poverty-struck East. On the whole, however, Das reiterates the Aristotelian view that the state 'which is composed of middle class citizens is necessarily best constituted'.

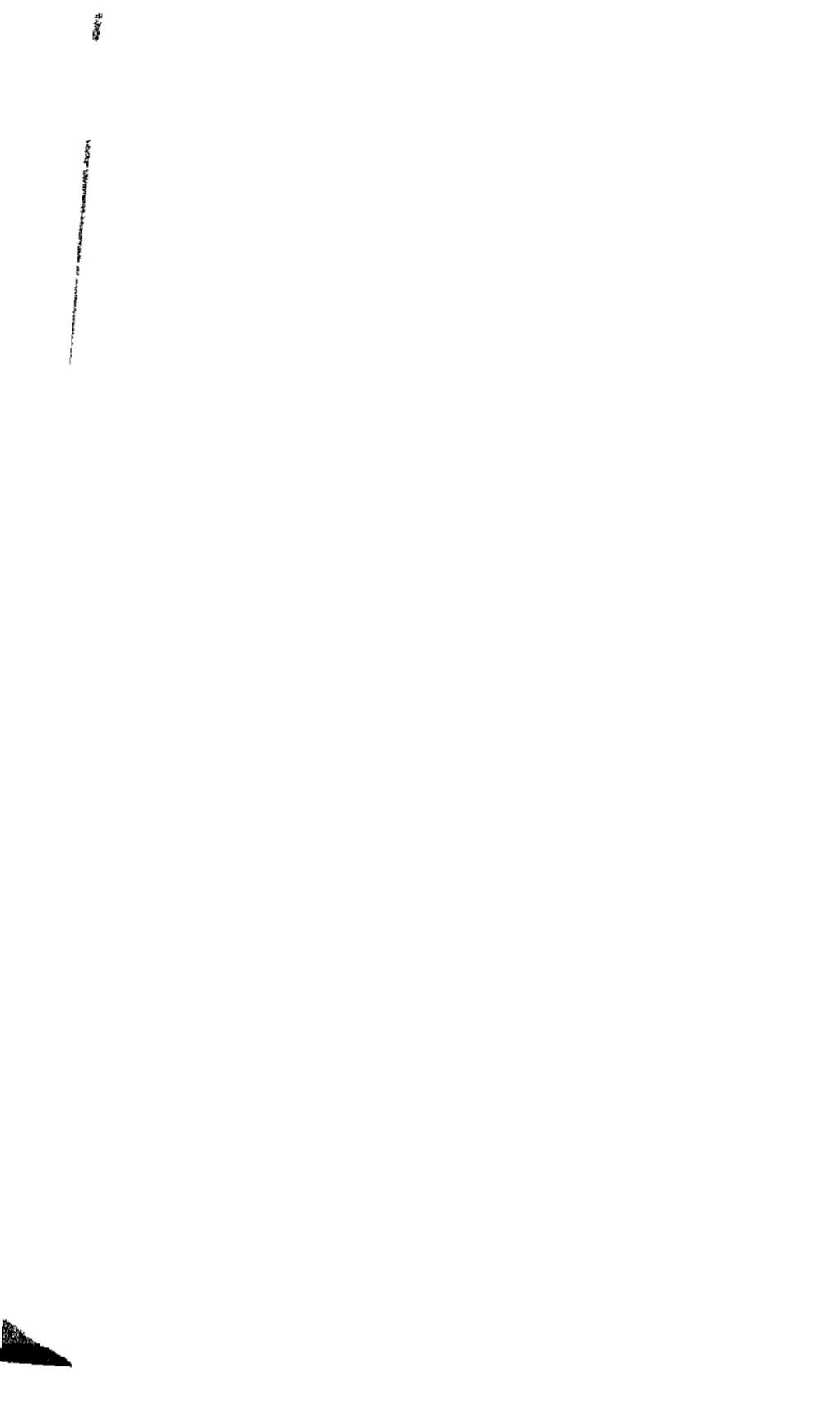


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## Part One

# The Rise of the Middle Class in India and Western Europe

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## Middle Class and Secularization: The Muslims of Delhi in the Nineteenth Century

• Margrit Pernau

**A**lthough this paper is concerned mainly with the Muslims in north India, the initial question is a comparative one. Simplifying to an almost inadmissible degree, one might say, that in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, the middle classes and especially the educated middle classes, turned away from the church and from organized religion. A critical attitude towards the church, an emphasis on individuality and the reliance on human reason as opposed to the authorities was even held to constitute one of the main characteristics of a male middle-class attitude. This is commonly explained by the impact of modernization, notably by enhanced social mobility, rapid economic transformations and urbanization. These changes, it is argued, undermined established certainties and called for new answers which could no longer be provided by the traditional religion.

In nineteenth century north India, on the other hand, the middle classes (we'll come back to the question of a correct term later) not only did not leave Islam, but became the main supporters and the driving force for reformist Islam. And again, this is explained by the impact of modernization, notably by enhanced social mobility, urbanization and rapid economic transformation, which called for a reassurance which could only be provided by religion. If the

I would like to thank Professor André Béteille, Professor T.N. Madan, Professor Marc Gaborieau and Professor Rudolf Schlogl for their great patience in discussing the concepts of secularization and secularism.

same set of variables provides the explanation for two sets of development, which are not only different, but point in opposing directions, it is obviously worthwhile to have a second look at both the phenomena.

In this paper I will attempt to shed some light on the interrelation between the middle classes and secularization in the Islamic context by focusing on Delhi. In the first part I will concentrate on the question whether a Muslim middle class existed at all, how it was composed and from which sources it drew its cultural identity. The second part will centre on religious changes and the moving forces behind them. What were the relations between the reformist Islam and the rising middle class? In which ways and for what reasons were both the theology and the forms of piety provided by this movement taken up by the middle class? What was the position of the *ulama* within the middle class? In the last part I will discuss Niklas Luhmann's concept of secularization as a functional differentiation between religion and other social subsystems. The question will be, whether there has been an evolution towards this kind of secularization in the nineteenth century, and what were its relations to reformist Islam and its striving for an enhancement of piety.

### **WAS THERE A MUSLIM MIDDLE CLASS IN DELHI?**

The images drawn of the Muslims in the nineteenth century still tend to depict them as either decadent nawabs or illiterate, fanatical masses. But is it true that the middle class consisted only of Hindus and Jains? Was there really no Muslim middle class in north India?<sup>1</sup>

#### *The ashraf: The nobles and the well-born*

Unlike in the European context, for nineteenth century north India it is difficult to draw a definite line between the nobles and the middle classes. Who was regarded as noble? What constituted the nobility of a nobleman? On the one hand nobility could be defined primarily with reference to the royal court. In this case, the nobles were those who served the monarch in an exalted position and received rewards

<sup>1</sup> Even Sanjay Joshi in his otherwise excellent work (*Fractured Modernity Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, Delhi 2001) starts his discussion on the emergence of the middle class in religiously neutral terms, but in the course of the book focuses more and more on how the public sphere, gender relations and religion were dealt among the Hindu middle class.

in the shape of land grants and titles. However, this constituted only one aspect of the Moghul nobility, the one which pointed out the dependence of the nobility: a noble was noble because the emperor honoured him of his free will. On the other hand, nobility could be linked with noble descent: here a noble was noble because he descended from a noble lineage. In this case, the honour the emperor bestowed upon him was not constitutive, but a recognition of what was due to the scion of an illustrious family.

This pride in descent from a family of noble immigrants from outside India (*ashraf*), as opposed to the descendants from converts (*ajlaf*), however, was not limited to the titled and landed nobility. Thus, according to context, *ashraf* can be translated either as well-born or as noble. Although in theory this status could only be inherited—hence to a certain extent it contradicted the free choice of the monarch—this group would also include all those, whose social status denoted so much respectability that they could successfully claim foreign descent. Thus, within limits, it was lineage that followed status, and not the other way round (Ahmed 1966, pp. 268–78).<sup>2</sup>

The decisive conceptual dividing line hence separated not three groups, but two: the respectable and well-born, and the rest. The notion of *ashraf* linked the nobility and those whom we would qualify as middle class in the European context, defined in terms of economic position, profession and cultural habitus. This is not to deny that within this group there existed multiple and intertwining differentiations. During the first half of the nineteenth century however, they did not lead to the formation of a 'middle class', perceiving itself as basically different from the nobility, nor to the evolution of the nobility into a closed estate, the entry into which was legally codified (for the European context compare Serna 1998, pp. 42–98). It would be a matter for separate investigation, in how far this development was linked to the different position the towns occupied in European and in Indian history (Rothermund 1992, pp. 273–84). Notably, it would be interesting to see how the enhancement of self-administration by the leaders of the trades, neighbourhoods and communities, which seems to have followed the decline of the Mughal authority in Delhi can be seen as a 'pre-history' of the middle class formation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See also the nineteenth century saying 'Last year I was a Julaha, a weaver; this year I am a Shaikh and next year, if prices rise, I shall be a Syed' (quoted in Muhammad Waseem, 1997, p. 19).

<sup>3</sup>See the negotiations between the court and these leaders during the siege of Dehli 1857 reproduced Department

### *Professions for the ashraf*

Traditionally, the quickest way to *ashraf* status lay in military career permitting access to both land and titles, often within a single generation. To a slightly lesser extent, administration, too, provided appropriate employment for those who already laid claim to *ashraf* status and to newcomers. Administrative jobs ranged from the prestigious tasks in the immediate surroundings of the Emperor to revenue collectors, police and judicial officers. The grant of land, revenue and pensions secured the acquired status for future generations and de-linked it from the actual exercise of a profession.

Though the advent of the British rule reduced the possibilities of a rapid rise through warfare, and though in Delhi the administration of civil and criminal justice shifted to the court of the Residency leaving the Mughal with nominal power of control, the structure of the administration was left intact and remained largely in the hands of the same families as before (Panigrahi 1968, pp. 121–58). As far as grants and pensions were concerned, except in the case of the Mughal Emperor himself, the British interfered only to a limited extent, but slowly tightened their control from the 1830s (Spear 1951).

Not all the *ashraf*, however, were in the service of the Mughal or colonial state or lived on their revenue income and pensions. Parallel to the political decline, since the second half of the eighteenth century Delhi had witnessed a remarkable renewal of intellectual activity. In the decade before the revolt, the city counted as many as six madrasahs which drew a large number of students from all over north India and beyond.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, the 1850 map of Shahjahanabad shows another four non-identified madrasahs, and it can be supposed that many of the over 100 mosques of the city also included provisions for teaching (Malik 1993, pp. 43–65). Delhi had nine newspapers in Urdu and Persian, not including the five journals published from the Delhi College, and a number of printing presses, which catered to increasingly diversified needs (Khan 1991, pp. 65–172; Minault 2000, pp. 260–78). We know of the biographical data of more than 130 Unani doctors for the nineteenth century, the actual number of medical practitioners, however, must have been many times that

<sup>4</sup>These were the Delhi College, the Madrasa Rahimiyā, the school Azurda had reopened near the Jama Masjid, the Khairabadi Madrasa, the Husain Bakhsh Madrasa and the school of the shrine of Mirza Jan-e Janan.

number (Rahman 1995). What was new in this period was of course not the existence of a Muslim intellectual strata, but the fact—although this still has to be investigated in detail—that this group turned their knowledge into a liberal profession, which both guaranteed their livelihood and rendered them independent from the patronage of a single noble.

It is one of the classic topoi of Urdu poetry to lament the decay of the city and its culture and to point out how the noble Muslims were reduced to poverty and had to bow before the rich Hindu traders. Is it true that the nascent Muslim middle class scorned the trade? As yet, we have no detailed information on the Muslim traders and entrepreneurs in the first half of the century. Although the merchant community of the Qaum-e Punjabian had already migrated to Delhi in the seventeenth century, their economic rise seems to date from the period after 1857. Two indications, however, document the possible existence of rich Muslim merchants even before this period: first, the papers which were recovered by the British from the royal palace after the fall of Delhi contain a petition by a large number of Muslim merchants, pleading their inability to further finance the revolt, as the military events had disrupted their trade routes to Calcutta, Benares, Kanpur, Ambala and Lahore (Yadav 1980, p. 106); second, the figures for the Delhi Municipality from 1863 to 1931, collected by Narayan Gupta (Gupta 1981, pp. 235–8), show that even at this late stage, nineteen out of thirty-six merchants were Muslim. Their presence in the Municipality indicates not necessarily their status as *ashraf*, but nevertheless a certain respectability. This is an area which certainly needs further investigation, both as to the composition of this group and their social status.

#### *Middle class identity? Sharif versus nawabi in the second half of the century*

Though the titled nobility and the simply well-born could be distinguished at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the line which divided them was not demarcated sharply as they shared a common cultural horizon in the notion of *sharif*. However, this very notion of *sharif* began changing its meaning in the second half of the century, and came to imply a bourgeois habitus, which no longer encompassed the nobility, but stood in stark contrast to what was perceived as a *nawabi* comportment.

This new meaning of *sharif* laid less emphasis on birth, noble lineage, and inherited qualities and more on behaviour and achievement. While this in itself could be taken as an indicator for a new middle class consciousness, the required behaviour, too, underwent a significant change. In contrast to the values of the nobility, which emphasized abundance of money as well as time, and despised petty calculating, here the husbanding of resources received primary importance. Demonstrative consumption and spontaneity were no longer important, instead hard work, the capacity to plan and to stick to planning, and punctuality became the new key words. The very venues which formerly marked a person as *sharif*, the poetical gathering until late in the night, the revelries in the houses of the courtesans, the ability to extemporize in Persian, now became suspect—Nasuh's burning of his son's library in Nazir Ahmad's *Taubat un Nasuh* being the most drastic poetical image of the opposition between the old and the new values. The same comportment, which at the beginning of the nineteenth century still had indicated cultural capital, producing and securing social status, became the symbol of *nawabi* decadence, from which the new middle class wanted to distinguish itself. The two-fold division between the *ashraf* and the rest had given way to a three-layered structure. The middle class fought hard—but with different arguments—to strengthen its boundaries from the old elite as well as from the menial classes (for a comparison with the rising Hindu middle class see Joshi 2001).

The genealogy of this development needs further research. The decisive event seems to have been the failure of the revolt of 1857, which deprived the traditional culture of its centre and patronage and discredited the leadership of the nobility. If the Muslims were to rebuild their houses after this catastrophe, they felt it had to be on a new basis (for the field of literature, this development has been depicted by Pritchett 1994). At the same time, this critique also drew from the no less traditional topics of reproving the nobility for their lifestyle, which was described as luxurious and sensual, lacking in seriousness and in commitment to values, which had time and again been brought forth by sufis and scholars, to the extent of refusing gifts from nobles.<sup>5</sup> In this context, Delhi claimed for itself to embody the more sober, one might almost say, bourgeois characteristics, while

<sup>5</sup> Only a careful reading of the extensive *mafuzat* literature can show, whether this refusal indicates a condemnation of the riches as such or only of certain ways of acquiring and spending them.

depicting Lucknow as the centre of the decadent feudal culture (Petievich 1992).

### *Piety and ashrafization*

Thus, what is new for the second half of the nineteenth century in Delhi (unlike for instance in the Presidency towns and more especially in Calcutta) is not so much the emergence of a new curriculum, leading to new professions, but a re-shifting of alliances within the traditional framework, endowing the middle group with an identity of its own clearly demarcated both from the nobility and the lower classes. If one wants to avoid the term of class for this group, which is linked with a common economic position, and if estate on the other hand usually denotes a position safeguarded by law, they could in Weberian terminology meaningfully be called an 'estate-like associative social relationship' (*standische Vergesellschaftung*). The link for this group the basis of their identity, could thus be seen in a common life style and a claim for social prestige based on this lifestyle (Lepsius 1992 pp. 8–18). This new lifestyle, on its part, was heavily intertwined with the teachings of reformist Islam.

Without having to decide here whether the reformist ideas brought about the rise of the middle class or whether the social changes induced corresponding changes in the religious ideology, for the purpose of this paper, it is enough to claim an elective affinity between theology and the forms of piety brought forth by reformist Islam since the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the rise of the 'new *ashraf*' to a position of social leadership in the nineteenth century.

While we are fairly well informed about the forms of piety advocated by the later-day reformists, notables of Deobandi provenance research on reformist Islam in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries has so far concentrated more on theological aspects than on the piety propagated for the lay followers (Fusfeld 1981, Rizvi 1982; Gaborieau 1999, pp. 295–307; Gaborieau 2001; Troll 1978). Two trends, however, emerge. First the emphasis shifted towards this-worldly activity as a means to salvation. This holds true even for the religious specialist, who is now supposed to experience the final stages of his way towards God only once he has returned to the world and has assumed the leadership of the community (Fusfeld 1981, p. 105). Second, the concentration on the revealed texts, the Quran and the Hadith, reduced not only the possibility but also the necessity of mediatorial activity of the

religious experts. This contributed both to the possibility of a rationalization of the relations of cause and effect on an everyday basis, and to a religious recognition of the values of personal achievement.

The behaviour thus induced became the central hallmark by which the *ashraf* were to be identified. It gave an internal coherence to the group and demarcated them both from the nobility and from the lower classes, both of which continued their reliance on traditional Sufi practices.<sup>6</sup> As these new forms of piety were, at least in principle accessible to everyone, they constituted an ideal vehicle for *ashrafization*, providing rising groups with the possibility to convert their economic status into social respectability by conforming to high religious standards. The connection between reformist movements and trading groups, while still to be proven in detail, seems a highly probable hypothesis (Malik 2000, pp. 315–33, Masud 2000, pp. 298–315).<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, this development dovetailed with British expectations as to the religious organization of Indian society and also the shared assumption that religion was all the more authentic, the more it was based on scriptures as opposed to practice and custom. However, one should be careful not to jump to the conclusion that reformist Islam owed itself only or to a large extent to the encounter with the colonial power, or even to see it as the result of colonial constructions. As for other areas, here too the element of dialogue and the mutuality of the encounter has to be further investigated: the interests that some sections of society shared with the colonial power, and also the limits of the commonality of interests. As long as they did not on their part head for a conflict with the colonial power, the representatives of reformist and scriptural Islam stood in good chance of being recognized as the speakers for the community.

## REFORMIST ISLAM

### *Was there an Islamic enlightenment?*

Commonly, historiography assumes a close relationship between the rise of the middle classes in Europe, enlightenment and secularization.

<sup>6</sup>See the continuing patronage of the Mughal court for the shrines of Nizam ud Din and Qutb ud Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, as well as the veneration of the royal family for the descendants of Shah Kalimullah and notably, in the years immediately preceding the revolt, for Kale Mian (Nizami 1985, pp. 517–19).

<sup>7</sup>Who fo Delh a east the elationsh p a he end of the n eteen h cen tury

At the same time, the period and the philosophy of enlightenment have been seen as the great dividing line between European and Oriental history (Schilling 1998, pp. 41–52), as the point where the common world history ended with Europe taking the route towards modernity, rationality and progress, and the Orient towards stagnation from which it could only be redeemed by western influence. For Islam this assumption of the missing enlightenment has recently been challenged by Reinhard Schulze, who pointed out that this idea was based on a very restricted notion of the European enlightenment reducing it to those stands, which criticized both the churches and the revealed texts, and posited human reason as the only means for arriving at the truth (Schulze 1990, pp. 140–59; Schulze 1996, pp. 276–325). Rather than bringing out the 'missing enlightenment' in the Indian tradition, while leaving intact European self-perceptions the task of a comparative study would be to deconstruct the very dichotomy between the rationalistic West and the religious East. Pointing out both the continuous importance of religious traditions in Europe, even in the very centre-stage of modernity, the creation of the public sphere (Veer 1995, pp. 15–43), and the importance of the rationalistic debates in Indian Islam, permits the depiction of a problem common to both cultures: the reconciliation of human reason and faith, of individual autonomy and scriptural authority. This would imply shifting the attention from the great philosophical systems to everyday negotiations, and hence comparing Islamic discussions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not, as usual, with Voltaire and Kant, but with the Catholic enlightenment and the pietistic traditions in central Europe, with developments like the Scottish enlightenment and later the evangelical movements in Britain. In turn would permit concentration on the social strata supporting these developments and on the institutional shifts they brought about.

Traditional Islamic learning, prevalent in India since the advent of Muslim rule, systematized in the *dars-e nizami* in the beginning of the eighteenth century has been associated with the Firangi Mahal in Lucknow. It was based on the one hand on the revealed text of the Qu'ran and the Hadith of the Prophet, and on the other, this theology

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between the Punjabi merchants and the Ahl-e Hadith, seem to have been fairly tight, the link between the Shah Waliullahi school and the merchant communities remains to be proven. However, the fact that mercantile interests seem to have provided an important rationale for declaring India *dar ul harb*, indicate a strong probability.

was strongly influenced by Greek, notably Aristotelian philosophy, emphasizing the central place of human reason and hence attempting to evolve a basis of communication across the borders of the Sunni-Shia and the Hindu-Muslim divide. This *ma'qulat* tradition (from *aql*, the human faculty of reasoning) thus laid the greatest emphasis not only on the study of logic, philosophy and epistemology, but also included mathematics, astronomy, law and sometimes medicine providing a comprehensive training for future administrators (Malik 1997).

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, this tradition came under attack from two schools, both based in Delhi: the reformed Naqshbandi order of Mirza Jan-e Janan (1700–81) and the *madrasah* of Shah Wali Ullah (1702–62), who was later acclaimed as forefather by almost all the different groups of Islamic reformers. They were united in their effort to discard what they perceived to be innovations and deviations from the pure revealed Islam, notably the excessive veneration of saints (Gaborieau 1999; pp. 452–68) and the syncretistic elements of popular Islam (Gaborieau 1996). Distrusting the ability of *aql* to arrive at the divine truth, they emphasized the study of *naql*, the revealed traditions (hence the name of *manqulat* for this curriculum), translated the Quran, thus facilitating the direct access to the revelation, prepared critical editions of the Hadith of the Prophet, systematized the exegesis and called for punctilious obedience of the *Shari'a*.<sup>8</sup>

At first sight *ma'qulat* would seem the place to look for an Islamic enlightenment. However, comparison shows that the affinity to enlightenment is less strong in a philosophical and scholastical tradition—which can very well accommodate popular religiosity as shown both in the European scholastic and neo-scholastic traditions and in the Firangi Mahali tradition—than in an approach which starts from a revealed text, but then proceeds to rationalize both the theological interpretation and, most importantly, the this-worldly behaviour of the believers. In Europe, this development took place in Protestantism, notably in its pietistic and evangelical forms. In India it was the reformist traditions of the *man'qulat* which would fulfill these criteria and hence come close to an Islamic enlightenment.

While the *man'qulat* tradition deprecated individual human

<sup>8</sup>This necessarily sketchy picture of the two traditions only aims at drawing attention to different trends. In reality, of course, the revealed texts and obedience to the *Shari'a* were important to the Firangi Mahalis too, and on the other hand even the Madrasa Rahimya allowed the *tafsir* *nizam* and the *da'y* eachings

reasoning on a theoretical level, its turn against the outstanding position of the mystic guide in favour of the possibility of a direct access to the sources of faith in fact enhanced human agency—if not for everyone, at least for the educated, who could arrive at the revealed truth through their own mental efforts.<sup>9</sup> To this new individual responsibility corresponded the increase in debate, both at the level of the *mujtahid*s, public religious debates (Powell 1993), and the pamphlet wars: religion thus became the vehicle through which the middle classes constituted the public sphere (Joshi 2001, pp. 96–132).

### *The Ulama and their networks*

What was the exact relation between the reformist Islam and the middle classes? Who were the scholars, who aimed at the diffusion of these ideas? What was their social position and by whom were they supported? The main sources of information on the *ulama* in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are the so called *tazkirahs*, collective biographies regrouping either the scholars of a certain area or a certain tradition. As they usually give both the father and the mother sometimes the grandfather and other relatives and the teachers of each scholar, it is possible to trace extensive genealogies, which show the historical as well as the regional spread of ideas.

Scholars usually received their initial training in their hometown either from their father or some learned relative, or from a local teacher. At a fairly young age, they then proceeded to a centre of learning the choice being sometimes a personal one, but more often followed either the family tradition, or the tradition of the township. Though each school had its own network, these networks were not exclusive. Thus it was quite common for a young man who had arrived in Delhi to study at the Madrasa Rahimiya to take lessons from the scholars of the Khanqah of Mirza Jan-e Janan, while studying Arabic with a professor from the Delhi College, and eventually becoming a disciple at the shrine of Khwaja Mir Dard. After finishing his studies, the young man would either return to his hometown, or search for employment in the service of the British or a princely state.

<sup>9</sup>The one person, who is always quoted in connection with the Islamic enlightenment in India, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, initially came from this tradition. However, he is not dealt with at length in this article, as his central writing already belonged to a later stage and was so strongly influenced by Western philosophy that its impact on his contemporaries remained limited.

To gather information from the *tazikirahs* as to the social status of these scholars is more difficult, as scholars were supposed to belong to scholarly families. If the father lacked these achievements, he usually would be omitted quietly. Similarly, even sons who failed to keep up the traditions would often be granted an honorific *maulana* or at least *mulla*. Titles indicating noble status were rare, but they still occurred. Usually the scholars would, in a double way, have belonged to the same group of established or aspiring *ashraf*, who provided the main support for the reformist movement (Metcalf 1982, pp. 235–64). On the one hand, the majority of these scholars originated from this strata and remained linked to it throughout their life. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the cultural habitus of an *ulim* differed only very gradually from the other members of his family and social group, with whom he shared both the canon and the *adab*. On the other hand, families who regularly brought forth *ulama*, usually after some time were successful in claiming *ashraf*-status. In exceptional cases, this ascent could even take place within a single generation, as in the case of the founder of the Deoband seminary (Metcalf 1982, pp. 246–7).

It is even more difficult to come to a conclusion as to the financial position of these scholars. It has often been claimed that the loss of professional perspectives and thus of livelihood has been one of the reasons why educated Muslims joined the revolt of 1857. However, until the middle of the century, this type of education still qualified a person for all but the very highest administrative and judicial posts in north India, and it might well be that the expansion of the area covered by state intervention in the wake of the British conquest extended rather than diminished the number of jobs available. Nor was there—with the single exception of the Khanqah of Mirza Jan-e Janan—a marked reluctance to learn English and to take up employment with the British on the part of the north Indian Muslims (see the discussion between Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Ghulam Ali in Quadiri 1992, pp. 14–15). The scholarly family of the Khairabadis, a stronghold of the *mu'qulat* tradition in Delhi, is a good case in point. Fazl-e Imam Khairabadi held the office of Sadr us Sudur, the supreme judge at the Delhi court, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. His brother worked as a newswriter in the service of the British at Rajasthani courts, his three sons held judicial offices in the service of the East India Company and different princely states, while two nephews worked as personal secretaries to General Ochterlony (Quadri 1992, pp. 17–19). Nevertheless while his official positon

had still permitted Fazl-e Imam to occupy a position of outstanding respectability in Delhi, his son Fazl-e Haq felt that his talents no longer received the recognition they deserved and left British employment for a career in princely states (Quadiri 1992, pp. 23–6; Russell Islam 1994, pp. 61–2).

Beneath the surface, the social position of the *ulama* and their function in society had started changing. These changes were brought to a culmination in and after the revolt of 1857, but they cannot be reduced to the influence of a single event. It is to them that we now turn.

## SECULARIZATION

### *Secularization and re-Islamization*

In his book *The Function of Religion* (Luhmann 1999), Niklas Luhmann describes secularization as one of the consequences of the restructuring of society into a system which is primarily differentiated according to function. This restructuring in turn is the consequence of an increase in social complexity, which can only be met, if the different functions in a society are no longer taken care of by the society in its entirety, but by subsystems, which are functioning in an increasingly autonomous way.

In this process religion loses its position as an integrator of the social system in its entirety and becomes a sub-system similar to other sub-systems. The integration of these systems then is no longer hierarchical, but functional. Each sub-system is autonomous in the original sense of the meaning, it follows its own rules and its own rationality. It has its own set of experts, permitting a greater specialization and the enhancement of its performance capacity. In this way, the rationality and problem-solving capacity of the social system as a whole is increased.<sup>10</sup>

Thus understood, the notion of secularization focuses on the change of the social function of religion. As a sociological term, it has to be clearly differentiated from the theological interpretation of the phenomenon – not only is secularization quite different from a decrease in religiosity, be it its private or its publicly visible forms, its existence is also independent from the theological acknowledgement

of its legitimacy. Normative statements as to the possibility or impossibility to secularize Catholicism or Islam neither add to nor detract from the social position of religion.

In the European context secularization can thus encompass both the tendencies towards de-Christianization in the eighteenth century and the re-Christianization which took place in the nineteenth century. The religion into which the people were re-Christianized was different from the earlier form, as it had a different place in society (Schlogl 1995; Schlogl 2000a, pp. 238–84, Schlogl 2000b, pp. 33–55, Hahn 1997, pp. 17–32). Secularization could then come to mean social transformation providing the framework within which the political programmes of both secularism and fundamentalism could develop (Madan 1997). Is it possible to find a comparable secular trend towards 'secularization' underneath the movement towards re-Islamization in the reformist sense in nineteenth century north India? Some elements seem to point in this direction, but a lot of research and thinking has to go into the question before even a clear hypothesis can be formulated.

### *The changing position of the ulama*

An *alim* is a person who possesses *ilm*, which can be quite simply translated as knowledge, both worldly and religious. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the plural of *alim*, *ulama*, still carried the same meaning.<sup>11</sup> *Ulama* were the people who possessed knowledge, the scholars, independently of the character of the knowledge implied. If the connotation of religious scholars was intended, as for instance in the case of the teachers at the Khanqah of Mirza Jan-e Janan, the term used was *ulama-e din*.<sup>12</sup> However, it seems that even in this instance it was rather the pious lifestyle which was implied, than a differentiation between worldly and religious scholarship.

While *ilm* and to some extent also *alim* have retained their original meaning until today, the term *ulama* since the middle of the century began to acquire the significance of a group of scholars, who dealt

<sup>11</sup> See for instance *Burhan-e Qate'*, *Ghiaz ul Lughat*, *Karim ul Lughat* [1861] *Lughat ul Kishore* [1891], *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1960ff.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar us Sanadid*, Delhi 2000 (reprint) who differentiates between *masheikh* (pp. 461–96), *ulama*, which he uses for instance for *Hakims* (pp. 507–16) and *ulama-e din*, which he reserves for law scholars and 'the teachers of the Madrasa Rahimya' (pp. 517–84).

only with the traditional religious sciences—specialists of the religious sub-system, to use Luhmann's terminology. The scholarship of these 'new' *ulama* was restricted to knowledge relating to redemption and salvation ('Heils-und Erlösungswissen'), and now excluded the knowledge relating to rule and administration ('Herrschafts- und Funktionswissen') as well as the knowledge relating to culture ('Bildungswissen') (Scheler 1960, quoted in Lepsius (1992), p. 13). Thus, the *ulama* trained at the great theological colleges of the second half of the nineteenth century, at Deoband, the Nadwa or one of their dependencies, already by their professional formation were excluded from taking up employment in any field other than the religious sub-system. The British construction of the 'Mutiny' as a revolt in which Muslims for religious reasons took a leading part, and their consequent distrust of the *ulama* certainly was one of the central reasons for this development. However, even in a princely state like Hyderabad, which by its treaties was protected from direct British intervention in the field of education, and to some extent also of administration, a similar transformation took place. In the middle of the century, Salai Jang's foundation of the *Dar ul Ulum*, based on a traditional curriculum, had still aimed at providing the state with competent administrators to carry through a thorough reform of the state government. Soon, however, it became clear that the alumni of this institution would not fulfill the hopes set on them and increasingly the state relied on students coming from the 'modern universities, from Aligarh or from the Nizam College.

For the *ulama*, this development implied a loss of income and possibly also of social status. While the theological movement of return to the original sources of the faith together with the translation and propagation of the central texts tended to enhance the possibility of every learned person forming his own judgements on appropriate religious behaviour, thus undermining the exclusivity of the *ulama's* position, the social movement tended to point in the opposite direction. The differentiation of religion into a subsystem with its own set of specialists, who even developed a 'professional consciousness' of sorts, who tried to find institutionalized ways of conflict resolution and to co-ordinate their action<sup>13</sup> led to a situation opposing the

<sup>13</sup> For the motivation behind the foundation of the Nadwat ul Ulama see Malik, Gelehrtenkultur, for the foundation of the Jamiat-ul Ulama and the discussions on its scope of action see Rozina 1980

larity with an increasingly organized set of religious specialists. 'The sacralization of religion and the autonomy of a 'secular' worldly sphere are closely linked and enhance each other. However, more research on the transformation of the piety of the *ashraf*, and notably on their relation to the *ulama*, is needed, before it will be possible to tell how this differentiation was translated into everyday practice.'

### *Tajdid or transformation of religion?*

In seeking to interpret the religious development in the nineteenth century with the help of Luhmann's categories, we have left the self perception of the Muslims of Delhi far behind. The leaders of reformist Islam did not see their endeavours as something new, but on the contrary, as one of the periodically necessary movements of return to the pristine purity of the religion. For them, the new religion was the old one (Metcalf 1982, pp. 3–15).

However, in the *fatawa* of Shah Abdul Aziz, written in the first decades after the British seizure of Delhi, it is possible to discern a theological response to social differentiation. This differentiation was certainly exacerbated by the fact that the different sub-systems were submitted to the colonial power in a very different degree, and that assigning a sphere to 'religion' as opposed to 'politics' might render it less permeable to British intervention. As in Europe, the endeavour of the religious specialists to ward off interventions of the state, here too, it may have constituted an important factor for not only their coming to terms with the division between the sacred and the secular but also for their active propagation of this separation. Although the contemporary British perceptions of private and public may have provided an opening for this argumentation, only the detailed examination of the way established arguments have been used and transformed can show the reciprocal weight of tradition and British influence.

Though Shah Abdul Aziz ruled that India had become a *dar ul harb* by reason of the British holding the supreme political power—collecting revenue, exercising civil and criminal jurisdiction—it still did not come under that category of *dar ul harb* which necessitated either *jihad* or emigration, as the British did not prohibit the calling of the prayer, the observation of the fast and the preaching of Islam (Rizvi 1982, pp. 225–37). This may be interpreted as the—certainly very qualified—recognition of an autonomy of the political sphere. In the same way he did not prohibit the acquisition of an English

education, as long as it did not interfere with Muslim religious obligations (cultural autonomy), nor the taking up of service under the British government (economical autonomy) (*Ibid.*, pp. 237–44)

This tendency to constitute the private as the true sphere of religious identity, to hope for a regeneration of the community of believers through a renewal of personal faith of the individuals—and above all of their wives and daughters—continued with increasing intensity in the second half of the nineteenth century. However as Sanjay Joshi had pointed out for the Hindu community (Joshi 2001, pp. 106–13), for the Muslims, too, this emphasis on individual and private piety by no means implied renouncing the public sphere—on the contrary, the debates, first on education, then on the need for a world-wide Islamic solidarity, effectively combined personal religious feelings and political action (for details and further references see Pernau 2002). How did the transformation of religion we have just described impinge upon its place in the public sphere? How did the relation between religion and politics change under the conditions of a beginning secularization? It is to these questions that we turn in the concluding paragraph, drawing our examples from the Khilafat agitation after the First World War.

### *Secularization: An irreversible process?*

If following Luhmann, we consider secularization as a reaction to the increase of social complexity, this process is irreversible as long as this complexity continues to exist. How then is a movement like the Khilafat agitation to be interpreted, which is commonly seen as the result both of religion entering politics and of the alliance between the *ulama* and the politicians (Minault 1982)? Isn't the very success this movement enjoyed, at least until the abolition of the Khilafat by the Turkish National Assembly an indication of the fragility of whatever secularization had taken place in the nineteenth century? How do we interpret the multiple statements, both by religious leaders and by Muslim politicians that a separation of politics and religion is not possible in Islam?

Two levels of argumentation have to be carefully distinguished. The first involves the structure of the society and, derived from it, the place of religion. It is at this level that it has to be decided whether secularization takes place or not, whether politics and religion constitute distinguishable sub-systems or an integrated whole. The Khilafat movement was led by an alliance between the politicians

whom Francis Robinson has called the 'Young Party in Muslim Politics' (Robinson 1997), and parts of the *ulama*. In no respect did this alliance lead to a merger between these categories. Even when Muhammad Ali started using religious arguments to back up his political position after his conversion in prison, this did not transform him into a member of the *ulama*. In the eyes of the Muslim politician, the latter remained religious specialists—in no way did their knowledge, related to redemption and salvation, endow them with a special competence in politics.<sup>14</sup> And while the Khalif was certainly a powerful symbol of Islam and to a certain extent claimed as a spiritual ruler, there was no attempt to endow him with worldly power over the Indian Muslims. Thus, the conceptual and structural division of the spiritual and the secular not only remained intact even at the height of a religio-political movement, but even became reinforced.

The second level of argument concerns the normative interpretation of this social reality: here it is not secularization which is at stake, but secularism. It is to this level that the statements about the impossibility of the division of politics and religion belong. They refer not to the actual transformation of social structure, but to the legitimacy of a policy furthering or even acknowledging these developments. The absence of an ideology of secularism, however, is no indication whether or not secularization did take place.

This clear-cut distinction between secularization and secularism between social structure and ideology enables us to perceive and thus further investigate the 'fractured modernity' (Joshi 2001) of the middle class, which provided the driving force for both secularization as well as reformist re-Islamization.

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<sup>14</sup> See the speech at the first session of the Jamiat ul Ulama-e-Hind by Sayyid Jalib, editor of the *Hamdard*, in which he claims that while the politicians were willing to accept the religious lead of the *ulama*, the political representation of the community did not lie with them but with the Muslim League (Parvez Rozina p. 34).

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## MERCHANTS, ENTREPRENEURS AND THE MIDDLE CLASSES IN TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIA

• Claude Markovits

The notion of a unified and large Indian middle class is a fairly recent construct, the product of the ongoing liberalization, and of the unreasonable expectations of market analysts and multinational firms regarding the size of the Indian market. A recent author underlines that, even understood solely in terms of consumption, the Indian middle class 'cuts a rather pathetic figure' (Gupta 2000, p. 95). This is, however, a view which has been formed by a comparison with the developed West. In relation to other developing countries, and even more so to the mass of the poor and the ordinary working population in India itself, the figure it cuts is not that pathetic. But there remains the problem of where to locate this vast and fairly undifferentiated group on the social map of India. Prior to the 1990s, social scientists generally preferred to talk of the middle classes to take into account the extreme diversity of the middle strata of the Indian society. Whether singular or plural, the two dominant narratives of the rise and growth of this group in India have been a 'Macaulayan' one and a 'Kaleckian' one. In the former, pride of place was undoubtedly given to the English educated professionals as forming the core group in the Indian middle class, while in the latter, merchants and entrepreneurs occupied a more central position. In this paper, I seek to present an alternative narrative, in which Macaulay and his kind play no role, but which also takes some distance *vis-à-vis* the Kaleckian model, a narrative of the slow emergence, from within a merchant world, of a strata of entrepreneurs who have become an

important component of the Indian middle classes. In the first part I take a quick look at these two dominant narratives.

### A CRITIQUE OF TWO DOMINANT NARRATIVES

Although the rise of an Indian middle class is generally traced to the colonial period, in particular to the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when Macaulay's programme outlined in his famous 'Minute on Indian education' of creating a 'class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Macaulay 1835, quoted in Varma 1998, p. 2) started being implemented by the colonial state with the creation of universities and more generally the encouragement given to the expansion of Western education in the major cities of India. However, it should be noted that neither Macaulay nor other colonial luminaries used the term 'middle class' in conjunction with the emerging new social group of Indian English-educated litterati. Actually it could be argued that the use of the term 'middle class' in the Indian context was fundamentally an anathema to them. It was a basic assumption of Western 'orientalism' that one of the major differences between European and 'Oriental' societies was precisely the absence in the latter of a 'middle estate', of an intermediate class between the tiny dominant elite and the mass of the subject population. Recognizing the existence of an Indian 'middle class' would have amounted to acknowledging a certain degree of similarity between the English and Indian societies which would have endangered the colonial project itself. Macaulay himself thought in terms of a class of intermediaries, of cultural brokers, who were basically clerks, but not 'middle class', with the connotations of respectability and affluence which the term had in the nineteenth century. As Indian nationalism emerged in the late nineteenth century, British colonial administrators were careful not to define it as a 'middle class' movement, but tended to dismiss it as reflecting the views of a 'microscopic minority' of elite individuals totally cut off from the masses of India. The early Indian nationalists in their turn, in spite of the fact that they undoubtedly belonged to the middle strata of society (they were mostly lawyers and professionals) were wary of defining their movement and aspirations as 'middle class' and preferred to present themselves either as an aspiring elite or, in a more populist fashion, as the vanguard of the people.

The theme of the rise of an Indian middle class or rather a petty bourgeoisie was first elaborated upon only in the 1930s, mostly by

Marxist authors, such as Rajani Palme Dutt (Dutt 1940), but in orthodox Marxist fashion (although there is some ambiguity as to Marx's own position on the question), they saw this class as doomed to be squeezed by the growing polarization between a big bourgeoisie and an emerging proletariat. A slightly modified form of the classical Marxist position was articulated by D.D. Kosambi in the introduction to his celebrated book, *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India* (Kosambi 1964, p. 2). He viewed the Indian bourgeoisie as divided into two sections: the 'real capitalist bourgeoisie' which dominated finance and mechanized factory production, and the 'petty-bourgeois class of shopkeepers', which dominated distribution, and was formidable by reason of their large number. He tended, therefore to view the petty bourgeoisie not as an 'intermediate class' but as a section of the bourgeoisie.

The first academic author to deal in a systematic way with the question of the Indian middle class, B.B. Misra, however, came from a completely different ideological horizon (Misra 1961). He offered a broad-ranging historical survey in which he put forward a decidedly Whiggish<sup>1</sup> view of the rise and growth of the middle class in India which he equated with a phenomenon of modernization induced by colonialism and the impact of the West. This kind of approach sounds rather obsolete forty years later, but one of Misra's merits was his alertness to the great empirical diversity of the Indian middle classes. In particular he was careful to distinguish among a commercial middle class, an industrial middle class, a landed middle class and an educated middle class, in which he gave particular attention to the practitioners of what he called 'the learned professions', and not to reify any of these categories as constituting the Indian middle class. In spite of his empirical caution, in the 1960s the dominant narrative of the Indian middle class was nevertheless undoubtedly 'Macaulayan', inasmuch as it put at the centre of the stage those who were the English educated, and directly linked the Indian middle class to modernization theory which was then the fashionable paradigm. This view was

<sup>1</sup>Typical is the following passage, p. 69. 'The growth of the Indian middle classes in modern times proceeded from certain new conditions which developed under the rule of the East India Company, especially after the abolition of its trading monopoly in 1833. These new conditions were, for example, the mild and constitutional character of Government and the rule of law, the security of private property and the defined rights of agricultural classes, a national system of education and a period of continued peace, an economy of *laissez-faire* and a liberal policy of employment and social reform.'

challenged in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the rise of the so-called 'Cambridge school', which tended to dismiss the link between Western education and political consciousness, especially in accounting for the emergence of the Indian nationalist movement, but did not come forward with an alternative sociological formulation.

In the following decades, the burgeoning sociological literature about India paid relatively little detailed attention to the middle class preoccupied as it was with grander questions regarding caste and class and discussions of the Dumontian and other paradigms. It was left to economists and historians operating within a broad Marxist framework to put forward an alternative view which I call 'Kaleckian' because it derived its original inspiration from a short article on 'intermediate regimes' by the famous Polish economist (Kalecki 1972). It had been written in the 1950s but was translated into English in the early 1970s and attracted the attention of K.N. Raj, who applied Kalecki's insight to the Indian case in a well-known article (Raj 1973). Later users of the notion included Asok Mitra (Mitra 1977), Prem Shankar Jha (Jha 1980) and Richard Fox (Fox 1984). In an attempt at synthesis (Stein 1991), the historian Burton Stein elaborated on Kalecki's and Raj's contributions to put forward a *longue durée* view of India as an 'intermediate regime' centred on a characterization of the 'petty bourgeoisie' as a particularly significant category in both economic and political terms. The rise of this petty bourgeoisie was related to a particular form of the transition to capitalism which started in the eighteenth century before colonization but remained largely unrealized till the late twentieth century. Far from being a sign of triumphant modernity, the rise of this class was perceived by Stein as emblematic of an arrested transition and of the kind of populist politics that it bred. This class was seen by Stein and others as a class in itself and not as a section of the bourgeoisie. It often frontally opposed the latter, but it was also in an exploitative relationship *vis-à-vis* the mass of the people. Stein's view, which was couched in a somewhat dogmatic language, never gained wide acceptance in an academic community which was increasingly steeped in culturalism and post-modernism and the 'Kaleckian' paradigm, with its clear Marxist connotations, largely fell into disuse during the 1990s. It is interesting to note that a recent widely-celebrated essay on the Indian middle class (Varma 1998), ignores Kalecki altogether, and basically goes back to a Macaulayan narrative of the origins of the middle class.

These two narratives, while addressing different concerns and adopting different angles of vision attempt to locate the middle class

into some broad historical scheme, but give little detailed attention to the historical process of formation of a class of merchants and entrepreneurs. In this paper I shall focus exclusively on the latter group and shall not preoccupy myself primarily with definitional problems. I leave it to the sociologists to present us with neat classifications. For the purpose of this paper, I shall adopt a largely pragmatic and empirical definition. The section I shall be looking at will be those merchants, traders and entrepreneurs who are not strictly speaking shopkeepers (the latter constituting a very large category on which there exists practically no empirical work in the Indian context), but do not belong to the very top echelons of the business world either. I will thus deliberately exclude from my area of inquiry the Birlas, the Tatas and other big capitalists, who are certainly not 'middle class' and about whom I have written at length elsewhere (Markovits 1985, 1996). The people I am going to talk about are 'middle' in terms of their incomes, in the sense that they do not belong to the low income majority or to the tiny elite of the really rich, but range from the moderately well-off to the conspicuously affluent, although, given the lack of reliable income-tax statistics, nothing very detailed can be said about their actual income. They are merchants, traders and medium or small-scale industrialists. They obviously account for a significant chunk of the overall middle classes in terms of numbers, but there remains a big question as to whether they constitute a separate social group or can be seen as part of a broader sociological category. My approach to them will be decidedly historical, because there is a certain lack of readily available historical literature on the subject.

#### **THE MERCANTILE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SECTOR OF INDIAN SOCIETY SINCE THE MIDDLE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Although the paper is supposed to address specifically the twentieth century, I feel it would be totally artificial to start the narrative around 1900, since there was a large amount of direct continuity between the developments in the second half of the nineteenth century and those in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the first significant break occurring only around 1920.

The middle decades of the nineteenth century saw a series of concomitant developments which concurred to reshape to a significant extent the profile of the mercantile world of India, although they did not amount to a complete revolution. These developments were on the one hand of an economic nature—the beginning of a transpor-

revolution with the building of the first railways, the birth of a mechanized textile industry (cotton in Bombay, jute in Calcutta) and the reorganization of banks (with the passing of the Presidency Banks Act of 1876) and financial markets (with the gradual emergence of stock markets in Calcutta and Bombay) along 'modern' lines. On the other hand these developments were of a political and legal nature—the completion of the British conquest of India and the political reorganization following the end of the 1857 Revolt, with the introduction of British company law and more generally a British-inspired legal system into India. The mercantile world felt the impact of those developments only gradually but they reinforced trends which were already at work from the 1830s. One of the main outcomes of these decades of reorganization was the definitive eclipse of the elite indigenous merchant bankers who still dominated the scene in most of northern India in the first half of the nineteenth century. As British power sought to reorganize itself along modern financial principles Indian bankers were totally deprived of their functions as state bankers, which survived only in the princely states, and the 'new men' who emerged had a different kind of link with the British. The collapse, in the 1880s, of the last great house of traditional north Indian bankers the Mathura Seths, was emblematic of the new dispensation. It should also be noted that the 1857 Revolt itself had a significant impact on the map of wealth in India, as many landowners who had supported the Revolt or had been perceived as too lukewarm in their support to the British saw their estates confiscated, while those who had been conspicuously loyal were rewarded. An important transfer of wealth occurred in the wake of the Revolt and it helped to propel forward a new type of merchants and men of business. The increasing commodification of agriculture linked to the growth of exports produced by the limited transport revolution provided this set of operators with new opportunities. They were mostly 'upcountry merchants' who migrated from some of the princely states to the colonial port cities. In Calcutta, they came mostly from Bikaner, Marwar and the Shekawati area of Jaipur State, the so-called 'Marwars' (Timberg 1978). They displaced the Bengali traders, the Gandhavaniks and the Suvarnavaniks, who had become the intermediaries of the British in the eighteenth century. In Bombay, there was a similar influx of traders from Kutch (Memonis, Khojas and Bhatias) and from the Kathiawar states, and a decline of the 'indigenous' Konkani Muslims who had played a significant role in the first half of the nineteenth century. These new men were pushed out by the poverty prevalent in the

princely states of the 'dry zone' of northwestern India (Gujarat, Rajasthan), and the decreased opportunities linked to the decline of old trade routes caused by the domination of colonial capital. They were also, more positively, drawn by the beckoning opportunities in the port cities and were adept at exploiting residual political differences between British India and the Indian states, particularly in the matter of taxation law. The absence of income tax in the princely states made it advantageous to regularly remit there a part of the profits earned in British India. There began thus, a regular stream of remittances from Bengal and the Bombay Presidency to the princely states of Rajputana, Kutch and Kathiawar, and many great *havelis* were built in small towns and villages of these areas thanks to the profits earned from the sweat and labour of the peasantry of Mymensingh and other areas of jute and cotton cultivation in eastern and central India. The 'new men', some of whom also hailed from the Punjab, Sind and other semi-arid areas of British India, were mostly traders, moneylenders and brokers of different kinds, who played the role of intermediaries between the mass of peasant cultivators and the mostly British export firms operating from a few colonial port-cities. The chain of intermediation found its concrete translation in the rise of merchant networks which linked the brokers in the port-cities (known as the *banians* to the big British firms), with the traders in the market towns and the moneylenders in the rural areas through a web of family, caste and community relationships. Some of these men of business also played a major role in the growth of the new mechanized industries, in particular of the cotton textile industry. While the original entrepreneurs had often been people from outside the world of trading (such as Ranchhodlal Chhotalal, a Nagar Brahmin who created the first cotton mill in Ahmedabad), very quickly merchants seized the new opportunities and, through the managing agency system, established their domination over much of industry. While an upper stratum of big merchants accumulated significant fortunes the majority of these traders definitely remained in the middle income brackets. Altogether this mercantile wealth probably accounted for only a small share of the landed wealth of the big zamindars and maharajahs, even if the latter were often heavily in debt.

The growth of an entrepreneurial group was further accelerated after 1920, by the granting of fiscal autonomy to India and the adoption of a limited policy of discriminative protection which *de facto* reserved for local entrepreneurs a share of the domestic market in steel, cotton textiles, sugar and other basic industrial commodities (Ray 1979). The

coming of independence and the rise of the 'licence raj' from 1960 onwards gave further impetus to the growth of this section, which came to occupy an important position in the political economy of India. As the industrial sector grew in both size and complexity, small and medium-scale industrialists exploited specific niches, especially after the banning of imports of manufactured consumer goods in 1957 (Jha 1984). They came from various backgrounds, but many were importers who converted themselves into industrialists and therefore, had a trading background. In spite of the rise of a significant industrial sector in India from 1920 onwards, it would still be difficult to argue for the emergence of a class of industrialists separate from the vast mercantile world which spawned it in the first place. Marketing and financial skills were always at a premium in Indian industry as compared to 'technical' skills, a situation which has perhaps, started to change only very recently.

The mercantile world of India in the pre-independence period in spite of its own great internal diversity, remained largely separate from the world of the English-educated middle classes which were more conspicuous and influential, politically and culturally. Merchant communities, with the notable exception of the Bombay Parsis, did not pay great attention to English education, which was of limited interest to them. Its main use was in the legal arena, and there were enough competent English-educated lawyers available for hire by mercantile interests, Gandhi being only one case in point. They remained steeped in vernacular regional cultures, to which they often contributed significantly through patronage of writers, journalists and musicians. Another factor responsible for separateness was ethnic differences. In eastern India for instance and particularly in Bengal, the commercial middle class was overwhelmingly dominated, from the late nineteenth century onwards, by the Marwari and other north Indian elements. The Bengali commercial element was largely displaced or confined to the lower rungs of mercantile activity and the separation between the educated Bengali middle class and the 'new' commercial middle class was complete. In Maharashtra likewise there was a wide gulf between the Marathi-speaking, largely Pune-based, educated middle class and the Gujarati-speaking commercial middle class based in Bombay. Even in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, where such ethnic differences were absent as both the Nattukottai Chettiar, who dominated the world of financial, mercantile and industrial enterprise, as well as the educated Brahmin and non-Brahmin middle class were Tamil speaking, there remained

a certain amount of social distance, in particular between Chettiar and Brahmins. With the coming of independence and the economic development it helped nurture, there occurred a limited rapprochement between the mercantile world and that of the educated middle classes through the medium of the state and the role it played in furthering industrialization. But it is only with the advent of consumerism as a dominant ideology in the 1990s that these two universes can be said to have engaged in a process of fusion which, however, remains far from complete. I shall now focus more specifically on the problem of values.

### **MERCHANT VALUES AND MIDDLE CLASS VALUES**

Do middle classes have values? It would be easy to give this question a cynical answer, which one could couch in the language of the Frankfurt school ('minima moralia') and stress that the central value for middle class people is making money, while their mode of thinking favours social conformism (keeping up with the Jones'). In India it has become fashionable to deplore the 'moral vacuum' of the present day middle class and its lack of social responsibility, as it remains apparently unconcerned by the persistence of mass poverty on an enormous scale. Such moral condemnations are facile, especially when they come from middle class westerners who do not face the same kind of ethical dilemmas as their Indian counterparts. In a different vein, it should be noted that sociologists of the Bourdieu school have emphasized the importance of cultural assets, the so-called 'symbolic capital' to the constitution of social elites, and the area of values deserves an exploration. The merchant world of India, particularly the dominant Hindu and Jain merchant communities of northern and northwestern India, was characterized by the existence of a set of values which amounted to a 'moral economy', and could be seen as a well constituted 'habitus' already by the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the 'new' educated middle classes which developed in India in the second half of the nineteenth century were more uncertain as to what constituted their core values. Although strongly influenced by the kind of Victorian values which were then dominant in Britain, they sought at the same time to preserve a domain of 'indigenous values' which, as has been often pointed out, they located largely in the sphere of 'domesticity'. On the contradictions this dichotomy between public sphere and domestic sphere could entail Ray provides an interesting and ironical commentary in

*Charulata*. Merchants precisely did not have to contend to the same extent with a contradiction between two spheres, since the world of business, thanks to the dominance of the family firm, was largely coeval with the world of domesticity and did not entail entering into a 'public sphere'. Most businessmen raised capital from within their own family, kin, caste or community and did not go 'public'. If they operated in the market place, the latter was so segmented as not to constitute a 'public arena' in any significant sense. Even nowadays, it is only a minority of large-scale firms which raise capital from the public at large. Most small and medium-scale firms rely on family and kin resources for their managerial staff and permanent capital and on borrowings from state banks for their working capital. This gives the business sector a wide measure of autonomy *vis-à-vis* other sections of the middle class, such as professionals, who tend to invest only in the big publicly quoted companies.

One difficulty in pursuing a comparative exercise regarding value systems is the existence of a certain degree of asymmetry in terms of information. While members of the educated middle classes were prone to express themselves orally and in writing and to leave traces of their views, merchants were a more inward-looking group, which rarely expressed itself in public. For the modern and contemporary period, there is no equivalent of the *Ardhakathanak* (Sharma 1970) the autobiography of the seventeenth-century north Indian Jain merchant Banarsidas which is a precious source of information on the mentality of late medieval or early modern merchants. We are left to deduct merchant values from an examination of the behaviour of the merchants rather than from texts written by them. This behaviourist approach has its limitations of course, but, in the absence of direct expressions, it is the only course open to the researcher.

As a point of departure, we can take the view of the late eighteenth century north Indian merchant world presented by the historian Christopher Bayly in his well-known *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars* (Bayly 1983), a world which appears to have remained largely unchanged till the twentieth century. It is a broadly 'Chayanovian' view which stresses the similarities between the merchant family and the peasant family inasmuch as it makes reproduction of the family rather than enlargement of its assets, its primary goal, leading to behaviour which could be 'anti-accumulationist'. The central notion for merchants was that of credit which was largely equated with honour and social prestige. Its preservation was deemed more precious than any aggrandizement. Great store was set on austerity and conspicuous

consumption was looked down upon as unworthy as well as economically counter-productive. Whether merchants actually conformed to this set of norms is of course open to question and it would be only too easy to find instances of non-conforming behaviour. It appears nevertheless also fatuous to totally dismiss norms to which there was undoubtedly deeply-felt adherence, in spite of lapses in actual conduct. Were these norms very different from those which guided the 'English-educated' section of the middle classes? Some common features would be immediately apparent, such as the devaluation of conspicuous consumption and the emphasis put on thrift and self-denial. In matters of sexual morality, there would also be a lot of common ground, a markedly 'puritanical' ethic, although on the question of female education, merchants would for a long period be characterized by a very cautious attitude, which would leave them open to accusations of 'backwardness'. An area of both difference and commonality would be that of 'service', the typical Indian middle class notion of *seva* which was popularized by organizations such as the 'Servants of India Society' and given central place by Gandhi who made it the basis of his teachings. *Seva* implied a certain distancing *vis-à-vis* family and community to encompass a notion of society at large, and that is where the ways of the merchants and of some members of the educated classes tended to diverge. While the latter often aspired to make 'service' the central vocation of their lives, merchants were too embedded in the universe of family and caste to conceive of such a devotion. They often financed liberally these 'service' activities but rarely engaged in them very deeply. Their sociability remained bound by notions of caste and family, which prevented them from interacting with society at large. This is one factor of explanation for the support given to Gandhian movements by many merchants. By financing these movements, often on a generous scale, the merchants could assuage their consciences without having to engage too openly with a public arena. Gandhi imported into the sphere of public action notions of honour (*abru*) and trust which were directly borrowed from the world of the Gujarati *banias* (Haynes 1991), to which his family belonged. However, the Gandhian attempt at a synthesis between the values of the merchant world and the more 'Victorian' values of the educated classes did not succeed in completely bridging the gap between those two sections of the middle classes and its long-term impact remains a matter for speculation.

Independence and the increased role played by the state in the economy tended to result in some measure of further rapprochement

between different middle class sections. In the heydays of the 'licence raj', aspiring capitalists had to develop a rapport with bureaucrats if they wanted to enjoy the bounties of the state, and a certain closeness ensued, although one would need detailed empirical data on topics such as matrimonial alliances to know how far it all went. Prior to the recent reforms, there was nevertheless no clear trend of integration between different middle class sections and the idea of one 'great Indian middle class' remained largely a fantasy. Since 1991, the exponential growth of consumerism (though it already existed) has tended to provide a unifying ideological cement to the diverse components of the middle class. However it is not certain as to whether the growth of consumerism is sufficient to keep together such an unstable conglomeration of groups.

Merchants and entrepreneurs constitute a numerically important section of the Indian middle class, but their place in its overall configuration remains uncertain. One durable characteristic which sets them apart from other middle class sections is their fairly narrow base of recruitment in terms of caste. While the middle class intelligentsia is drawn from a fairly large conspect of caste and regional groups, albeit mostly from upper castes, most merchants and entrepreneurs still belong to a limited number of castes, the *bania* and assimilated castes, and are drawn disproportionately from specific areas of the sub-continent, mostly the northwest (Gujarat, Sind, Rajasthan, Punjab). This situation has its roots in certain specific historical developments going back at least to the sixteenth century, which I have analysed elsewhere (Markovits 2001), and which I shall not evoke here. Pan-Indian merchant networks such as those of the Marwaris have entrenched themselves in many areas and are not perceived any more as forming 'immigrant communities'. It is even said that in Assam it was the Marwari merchants, whose presence in the region goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, who were partly behind the anti-Bengali agitation of the 1970s and 1980s. They continue to give preference in employment in their firms to members of their family, kin, caste and community, even if they are less competent than 'outsiders' (although probably to a lesser extent, now, than in earlier periods). Whether the ongoing 'liberalization' will result in breaking the hold of the *bania* castes on the mercantile and industrial sector is an open question. A new breed of entrepreneurs, not belonging to these castes, is undoubtedly present on the one hand in the agro-industrial sector (where they often come from peasant castes), and on the other hand in the so-called 'new economy' such as the computer

software sector (where there are many Brahmins and members of other upper castes), but the overall importance of these high-tech activities should not be exaggerated. The 'old economy', where the merchant castes are still solidly entrenched, weighs more in the balance in terms of assets (once the present-day bubble bursts, as it has already started doing) as well as of employment. Notice should, however, be taken of significant changes in the way the members of the 'traditional' merchant castes relate to education and politics. They have taken to English education to a greater extent than before, often have MBAs from American universities, and some of them have developed more permanent links with political parties, particularly, in northern and western India, to the BJP. In view of the recent rise of the Sangh Parivar, it is sometimes suggested that, through their privileged links to the Hindu right, the merchant castes have been able to acquire a kind of hegemonic position and that they have imposed their values on the middle class at large. This raises two kinds of questions, first, that of the exact type of relationship which the merchant castes have with the Hindu nationalists, about which little serious empirical work has been done and second, that of the 'hegemonic' nature of Hindutva ideology, which seems to be very much open to debate (Hansen 1999).

To conclude, it is not obvious to me that the merchant and entrepreneurial classes are as yet getting subsumed into an ensemble which could be called 'the great Indian middle class'. In spite of a rapprochement between this group and the professional and technical intelligentsia at the level of education and lifestyle, there remain significant differences. The universe of the merchants and small and medium-scale entrepreneurs is still centred more around the family which remains the basic economic unit, than that of other sections of the middle class which are more dependent either on the state or on the market at large. This might partly explain the apparent paradox that while, in theory, the entrepreneurs should be the driving force behind the ongoing liberalization process, in fact large sections of this group have various reservations *vis-à-vis* the process and tend to act as a brake rather than as an accelerator. Many of its members are still too deeply steeped in the structure of entitlements linked to the old economy to fully embrace a liberalization which could result in a complete reshuffle and redistribution of cards. As a result, they cannot be expected to give a clear direction to the process, and it will be left largely to the bureaucrats and politicians, constrained as they are by the compulsions of populist politics to define its pace.

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## chapter three

# 'Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit': A Class and its Values

• Heinz-Gerhard Haupt

The German experience may be of particular importance for the understanding of the Indian situation. It is not only the experience of the 'bourgeois conquerant'<sup>1</sup> winning political power by revolutionary means and creating conditions under which a bourgeois-capitalist development may occur step by step. But it is much more the history of a long process of formation against non bourgeois structures and forces, the history of a difficult internal formation of the class and its problematic relationship with liberal values and democratic structures. It refers to a period of transition a heterogeneous social formation and a problematic link between the middle classes and democracy. The end of a feudal-corporate society and the establishment of a new bourgeois society are at the background of the history of the German bourgeois. The particularities of the German bourgeois have even been explained by the backwardness of German society. The substance of aristocratic power and values, the lack of civic attitudes and values and the high allegiance towards state power, have been cited to explain the fact that the German society as a whole and the bourgeois as a part of it supported the Nazi party and Hitler after 1933. This structural interpretation was challenged by two Anglo-Saxon historians, David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, who underlined that in nearly all western societies similar structural conditions existed at the end of the nineteenth century and that besides the history of backward features of the German bourgeois, a history of impressive accomplishments could also be written (Martel

(Hg) 1992, Blackbourn 1987, R.J. Evans 1987; Blackbourn and G. Eley 1984; H. Grebing 1986, Nipperdey 1990/1992, H.U. Wehler 1973) The class itself is structured and legitimized by different criteria, by the reference towards accomplishment, money and wealth as well as towards education. These criteria could enter in conflict with each other as the fractions of the German bourgeoisie could compete for cultural and political hegemony.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the history of the German bourgeoisie is not identical with the triumph of liberal values and democratic political structures. Even if the class was never homogeneous in its political engagement and even if it would be teleological to reconstruct their history from 1933 backwards, it must be underlined that 1933 was also part of the evolution of the German bourgeoisie. The elite of the German society didn't resist the Nazi party and even supported it.<sup>3</sup>

## THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GERMAN BOURGEOISIE

The bourgeoisie was at the same time, a concept and a reality. The German term refers to the bourgeoisie as well as to the citizens, and most of the history of the word tries to show the links between economic and social conditions and the constitution of political rights. In 1817 at the Brockhaus, a famous German dictionary formulated that bourgeoisie in the largest definition are those persons in a state who are united amongst each other to defend their security and their rights. Each part of the bourgeoisie society is a bourgeois citizen... (Kocka, 22f).<sup>4</sup> The notion implied a great variety of social, legal and cultural significations. It might be restricted to the upper strata of businessmen, high civil servants, merchants and professionals (doctors, lawyers), utilized in order to describe all those who are citizens, inhabitants of a town or described as those who participate in the bourgeoisie culture. The first social signification was already formulated by the Prussian law at the end of the eighteenth century, the Allgemeine Landrecht. It underlined the importance of civil servants who had acquired an academic formation and were not governed by the rules of the local government, but were dependent directly on the state power. Those—as they were called—cultivated bourgeoisie might marry daughters of rich merchants and entrepreneurs, but they were separated by their standing and legal status from the mass of shopkeepers and master artisans.<sup>5</sup> Economic independence, non-physical labour, leisure and education were the boundaries between the upper and the lower middle class in Germany throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Beside

this social distinction, there was for a great part of the nineteenth century a legal one. Inside the old towns which had been called by Mack Walker 'home towns', the importance of the burghers remained during the nineteenth century. In order to be part of the citizens of a town, it was important to acquire the legal right which could not be inherited. The right to vote for municipal elections as well as the right to be secured in case of illness or poverty was linked—at least until 1871—to the burgher status, until 1918 in some of the German towns. Only those who were burghers of the town could participate in municipal elections.

Even if the urban corporations and a special poverty regime of the town citizens were abolished in 1871 with the construction of the German Empire, political privileges subsisted in the old towns until the end of the Empire.<sup>7</sup> The numerical importance attributed to the German bourgeois varied according to the criteria utilized. If historians restrict the bourgeoisie to the wealthy and independent upper middle class, they may calculate that around 5 per cent of the whole population in the nineteenth century was part of the bourgeoisie. If they include shopkeepers, master artisans and employees, this percentage may rise to 15 per cent. According to the approach of Lothar Gall and his scholars who studied the bourgeois population of German towns in the first half of the nineteenth century, during which they counted all citizens of these towns, about 30–40 per cent of a city's inhabitants were part of the bourgeoisie, and this percentage could rise in some towns to 80 per cent and go down in others to 20 per cent. This bourgeoisie included not only the wealthy merchants, high civil servants and entrepreneurs, but also the shopkeepers and even some workers.<sup>8</sup> The boundaries of the German bourgeoisie became even more uncertain as the bourgeoisie was not only defined by some bourgeois class position (wealth, independence, non-manual work), but also by the link between this economic position and a certain style of life. This style of life was not homogeneous during the nineteenth century. But some common features may be mentioned which came out of different researches. The bourgeois lifestyle was characterized by the hegemonic situation of the family and of family life. Inside family the most important values of the bourgeois society were transmitted and gender roles trained. Linked to family life were standards of cleanliness, of representation and of 'conspicuous consumption' (T. Veblen). The values transmitted by the family included personal accomplishment, rationality, discipline of work and life, as well as the control of emotional life.<sup>9</sup> Frevert 1991; Gebhart 1999; Call 1989.

Veblen 1958, Budde 1994, Pierenkemper 1991, pp. 149–85) Recent studies as opposed to earlier ones demonstrated a greater variety of lifestyles. For instance, besides the strong bourgeois man there were examples of male sensitivity and weakness which disappeared at the end of the nineteenth century with the militarization of social and cultural life. Inside the consumption space, the roles of men and women were clearly defined, but studies showed that at least in Zurich in the middle of the nineteenth century men spent more on clothing than women.<sup>10</sup>

Even if bourgeois norms permitted some varieties and interpretations, in reality they were consistent with a life based on wealth, leisure, help by one or more servants and material independence. Larger parts of the lower middle class aspired to imitate this lifestyle and to climb up, at least symbolically, the ladder of social advancement.<sup>11</sup> Members of the bourgeoisie themselves tried to diffuse these values in the nineteenth century society. This diffusion of bourgeois norms by means of books on behaviour, and schools and newspapers was rather important after 1870 and influenced even those who refused bourgeois supremacy. One striking example of this trickle-down effect of bourgeois values may be cited. Social-democratic workers who struggled against the bourgeois and capitalistic society, used bourgeois dark clothing on holidays and even during their meetings on 1 May in order to demonstrate their respectability.<sup>12</sup> If the diffusion of bourgeois values and lifestyle were used to give an idea about the blunders of the German bourgeois, then the class should have included non-bourgeois social groups as well.

The English notion of middle class is not well suited to describe the specifics of the German bourgeois. In the Anglo-Saxon world it might be a category uniting businessmen, professionals and civil servants, but until today it has been without great importance in structuring social life. In Germany these holistic categories were particularly important. The term used at first to describe the German bourgeois came out of the corporate world. Bourgeois were part of the Mittelstand, in a part of a structured society between the corporate order of the aristocrats and clergymen on one side and those who were not part of this order at all (peasants, beggars, journeymen). In the middle of the society could be found—if we follow some of the legitimizing discourses and self-description—most of the bourgeois values: wealth, self accomplishment, energy on one hand, but also moderation against revolution, civility against anarchy and aristocratic egoism, and work against leisure.<sup>13</sup> As the famous German dictionary

Der Brockhaus of 1821 put clearly bourgeoisie is a class 'which unites all those who are free and could not be counted between the aristocracy or the peasantry' (Kocka, p. 23). The notion used to describe and unite by a term the different bourgeois professions was overcharged with cultural and political values. After 1870 the notion of *Mittelstand* shifted towards the shopkeepers and master artisans who asked to use this notion for state protection against concurrence. The term bourgeois became more common to describe the unity among businessmen, civil servants and professionals. It could be used in a positive way but also to criticise bourgeois life and values.<sup>14</sup>

The history of the German bourgeois could not be understood without the notion of the 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). From the beginning of and during the nineteenth century and parts of the twentieth century this idea was part of a utopian vision of the future. Bourgeois life was conceived as being part of a larger project in which the life of men was organized according to rational and legal principles, the free market, functioning public opinion and the limitation of state power.<sup>15</sup> This optimistic self-definition did not correspond to the reality of bourgeois behaviour and organization. The political parties of the nineteenth century—even if they were supported by members of the bourgeoisie—did not always defend these values. Some scholars were even argued that the principles of civil society had been defended and realized more by social-democrats than by bourgeois parties.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the visions and actions of German bourgeois were not only restricted to the present day life, but also integrated in a broader societal project which was to be accomplished in the longer term.<sup>17</sup>

## THE HETEROGENEITY OF THE GERMAN BOURGEOISIE

Like all social classes in European history, the German bourgeois was not homogeneous. Max Weber himself distinguished four different fractions at the end of the nineteenth century: the wealthy owners, the academically qualified, the petite bourgeois and the workers. In his sense, classes did not possess structural homogeneity, but could reach it if some conditions were united in a polarized political situation for instance, the social class could attain a certain degree of unity.<sup>18</sup> Besides gender, age and regional differences, confessional plurality characterized the German bourgeoisie. The cultural reference towards Protestantism was highly characteristic. Some of the key bourgeois values came out of the Protestant vision of the world: self cultivation

ascetic lifestyle, individual accomplishment and work ethics. During the nineteenth century religious practice declined among bourgeois men. But in reality, inside the bourgeoisie, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant men and women coexisted. But this coexistence was not always pacific and friendly, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century and in the period in which the idea of a 'classless bourgeoisie society' was important. Protestant bourgeois and patricians in the German hometown excluded Catholics as well as Jews from the legal definitions of bourgeoisie. The access to a burgher status was linked in towns to a certain confession. In Protestant towns, Catholics and Jews could not get the rights of citizens and were marginalized.<sup>19</sup> This situation changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Köln, Catholics were present among the wealthiest parts of the population, and in the east German town of Breslau, one-third of the town bourgeoisie in 1870 were Jews, a quarter before the First World War. This confessional heterogeneity which varied from one town to another was one of the predominant features of urban bourgeoisie in Germany.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the confessional, there was also a structural heterogeneity. Historical research has distinguished among the old town, the self-cultivated and the rich bourgeoisie. The scholars of the so-called Frankfurter School around Lothar Gall privileged the town bourgeoisie in which they saw the supports of the idea of a household concentrated classless society of medium sized bourgeois existence. For them, the first half of the nineteenth century was the main period of this bourgeoisie. After 1850 a modern class society emerged in which the bourgeoisie became more egoistic and class-centred.<sup>21</sup> Hans Ulrich Wehler proposed another distinction. According to him the 1830s could be considered as the turning point for the town bourgeoisie which lost its paramount importance to the self-cultivated bourgeoisie which united around the notion of educated and cultivated civil servants, lawyers, doctors and high school teachers. In the 1830s—if we follow Wehler—the notion of education became more important to the self-definition of the bourgeoisie than the value of property. The years between 1830 and the First World War have been characterized by the predominance of the self-cultivated bourgeois.<sup>22</sup> Structurally this fraction of the bourgeoisie was not less heterogeneous than the whole class. In this part professionals (doctors, lawyers), civil servants and high school teachers, whose independence, wealth and living style were quite different, coexisted. But research has underlined the overarching power of education based on knowledge of the Latin language.

knowledge and formulated by early modern theorists. Its main focus was the idea of self improvement of the individuals by reading, thinking, leading an ascetic life and gaining broad knowledge ('Neuhumanistisches Bildungsideal'). The reference to these values and attitudes which were the consequences was considered by Hans Ulrich Wehler, strong enough to construct a rather cohesive social group and to overcome the structural differences in it. Jürgen Kocka was more sceptical about the power of education. He considered the self-cultivated bourgeoisie more as some kind of self-legitimation than a description of the bourgeois.<sup>23</sup> Both agreed that at the end of nineteenth century, the strengthening of the professions was accompanied by the development of some particular professional knowledge which progressively destroyed the ideological cohesion of the self-cultivated bourgeoisie. In the inner war period the economic bourgeois became predominant. During the nineteenth century this fraction of the bourgeoisie had insisted on its boundaries towards the self-cultivated bourgeois and had developed a strong sense of particularity.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the German bourgeois had not been politically united. For the German Empire, the sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius had introduced an important distinction. Political parties did not organize social classes but united—in his terminology—'milieu'. They expressed religious, regional and lifestyle factors as well as values and social situations. Inside the German bourgeoisie, Lepsius distinguished between a liberal milieu which was the outcome of the bourgeois professional life and a conservative milieu which was more land-based Protestant as well as the liberal milieu, and a Catholic milieu which succeeded in organizing a great variety of social groups under the protection of the Catholic faith and institutions against the modern German state. Before 1933, no political organization tried to organize the bourgeoisie against other classes. If there were organizations such as the Mittelstandspartei during the 1920s they addressed more the master artisans and the shopkeepers. Scholars even argued that the bourgeoisie was divided into several interest groups. Even if those tried to organize the 'creative hands' before the First World War, the organization was directed against the liberal fractions of the bourgeoisie.<sup>25</sup>

#### FACTORS OF COHESION OF THE BOURGEOIS GROUPS

Besides, cultural norms and values, the German bourgeois had been united by some mechanisms and organizations. One of the most

evident lines of separation between a bourgeois and non-bourgeois household had been the existence of servants. Normal bourgeois households had one or more servants at their disposal. They took care of the material organization of the household and permitted the bourgeois women to concentrate on education, arts and culture. This bourgeois feature was even taken over by the families of master artisans and shopkeepers who—for the sake of business or for the household—employed at least one servant. With the end of the First World War this structure disappeared.<sup>26</sup> Another factor of unity has been the life of associations. From the eighteenth century onwards, different associations developed in which bourgeoisie talked and drank together and developed some kind of sociability. These institutions were horizontally organized, open to all bourgeois men, that is to say those with some material independence and a certain degree of education. These institutions were internally egalitarian. Reading societies, free masons, singing and shooting associations as well as charitable clubs were the most developed institutions. In the first half of the nineteenth century they had been closed to foreigners. Bourgeois of Jewish or Catholic faith had not been accepted in Protestant bourgeois circles and the boundaries towards the lower middle class had been underlined. In a reaction towards this politics of exclusion, the Jewish and Catholic bourgeois developed institutions and associations of their own and closed these to other confessions. Inside these clubs, a specific idea of what a Jewish bourgeois or a Catholic bourgeois might be was developed.<sup>27</sup> Especially inside the Catholic bourgeoisie, during the 1870s and 1880s, ultramontain ideas and the rejection of Protestantism created new dividing lines while on the other hand more and more Catholic bourgeois accepted the idea of education and became part of the wealthier bourgeois of the town. Even if the network of associations had been divided for a long time during the nineteenth century along confessional engagement, there were some organizations which were open to all members of the bourgeoisie if they accepted a certain definition of the bourgeois model. The freemasons, for instance opened up their ranks to Jewish bourgeois from 1860s onwards and organized bourgeois men under a programme which came out of enlightenment and combined rationalism and cosmopolitanism.<sup>28</sup>

Another place in which bourgeois may find some consistency was the municipal life. In contrast to the French Revolution in which the local bourgeois was deserted after 1880 at the local level, in Germany the interest of the different bourgeois groups for the life and political administration of their town was strong. Until 1918

the non-democratic principle of the election procedure helped liberal notables to maintain their force in town administration despite their numerical minority. Being a member of the town council was considered by the bourgeois to be an honour. They provided charitable help and were also active inside the commissions, and among those who controlled and financed schools and museums, theatres and universities. In some towns inside this network, the difference between Christian and Jewish bourgeois faded and gave way to the formation of a self-conscious confessional pluralistic, but wealthy bourgeois. This has been the case in Breslau as well as in Frankfurt. All these examples denied the lack of civility which had once been attributed to the bourgeois in order to explain their weaknesses and their tendency to support Hitler.<sup>29</sup>

Ideologies had also been effective in creating a certain cohesion of the German bourgeoisie. Nationalism was especially productive in this sense. In 1871, the German Empire was not accepted unanimously by the German bourgeois. Those who were afraid of Prussian predominance or those who for confessional reasons defended the idea of a greater Germany under Austrian leadership were reluctant. Even after 1871 nationalistic arguments had been used to give higher legitimacy to arguments and positions inside the political struggles. The Catholics had been attacked as non-national elements because they seemed to be committed too much to the Pope.<sup>30</sup> But from the 1880s and the 1890s onwards, nationalism changed its definition and become more oriented towards the common Germanic ground of German history and to racial categories which helped to distinguish the Germans from other nations. In this context, nationalism developed a semantic which not only helped to integrate Catholics inside the German nation and to exclude Jews, but also to polish Germans. As an ideology organizing inclusion and exclusion, nationalism became particularly effective in the last twenty-five years before the beginning of the First World War. The Protestant church in its majority participated during this period and included the scientists as well. Even some of the sociologists thinking in universalistic terms did not escape the nationalistic influence. Max Weber as well as Werner Sombart used crude nationalistic arguments and supported the German war politics.<sup>31</sup>

Nationalism was also used in order to distinguish the bourgeois from the working class. Already the self-definition of the bourgeois stressed those factors which separated them from the workers, family life, ascetic norms, independence, non-manual work etc. On the

political level, nationalism helped to deny all patriotic feelings to the social democratic workers. They were accused of being people without a fatherland (*vaterlandslose Gesellen*). They were excluded from the nation for twelve years and even persecuted officially.<sup>32</sup> In this sense one may argue that nationalism helped the German bourgeois to organize the lines of inclusion and exclusion and that it was a powerful means of construction of some kind of internal cohesion. This statement does not exclude the fact that some parts of the bourgeoisie continue to criticise nationalistic orientation and that even after 1900 the political memory of the 1870-1 war lost its public importance.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the features of the German bourgeoisie developed before 1918 can help to explain why the bourgeois in their huge majority did not resist or even oppose the national-socialism and the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in 1933. Some factors should be mentioned in conclusion.

- 1 The fear of the 'reds', of the social democratic party and the communist party, was even stronger in the 1920s than it had been before 1914. In order to block the advance of the reds, the traditional elites preferred to collaborate with the Nazis.
- 2 The treaty of Versailles and the loss of international power and independence, was perceived by a bourgeois—whose self-definition was nationalistic as a shame—as an intolerable wound. This perception of the German situation often formulated in organic metaphors and nationalistic semantics by the Nazi party helped them to overcome some hesitation of the German bourgeois which was about the proletarian character of the Nazis.
- 3 The predominance given to 'education' (*Bildung*) and the distrust of politics, the high value attached to the spirit of life, but not to material reality made a part of the self-cultivated bourgeoisie unable to understand the deep political changes taking place in Germany and to defend the pluralistic values of democratic public life. This perception of reality helped them to excuse the violation of public individual rights by the Nazi party as well as the persecution of political opponents.<sup>34</sup>

In this perspective it is not astonishing that—even if the bourgeois survived as a social elite with a high level of self recruitment in Western Germany at least after 1945—the term 'bourgeois' which was highly associated with values and norms that were not compatible with democratic society did not survive in the public discourse. The

term 'middle' on the contrary continues to attract intellectuals and politicians because the 'middle' is seen as synonymous of moderation, wealth and future

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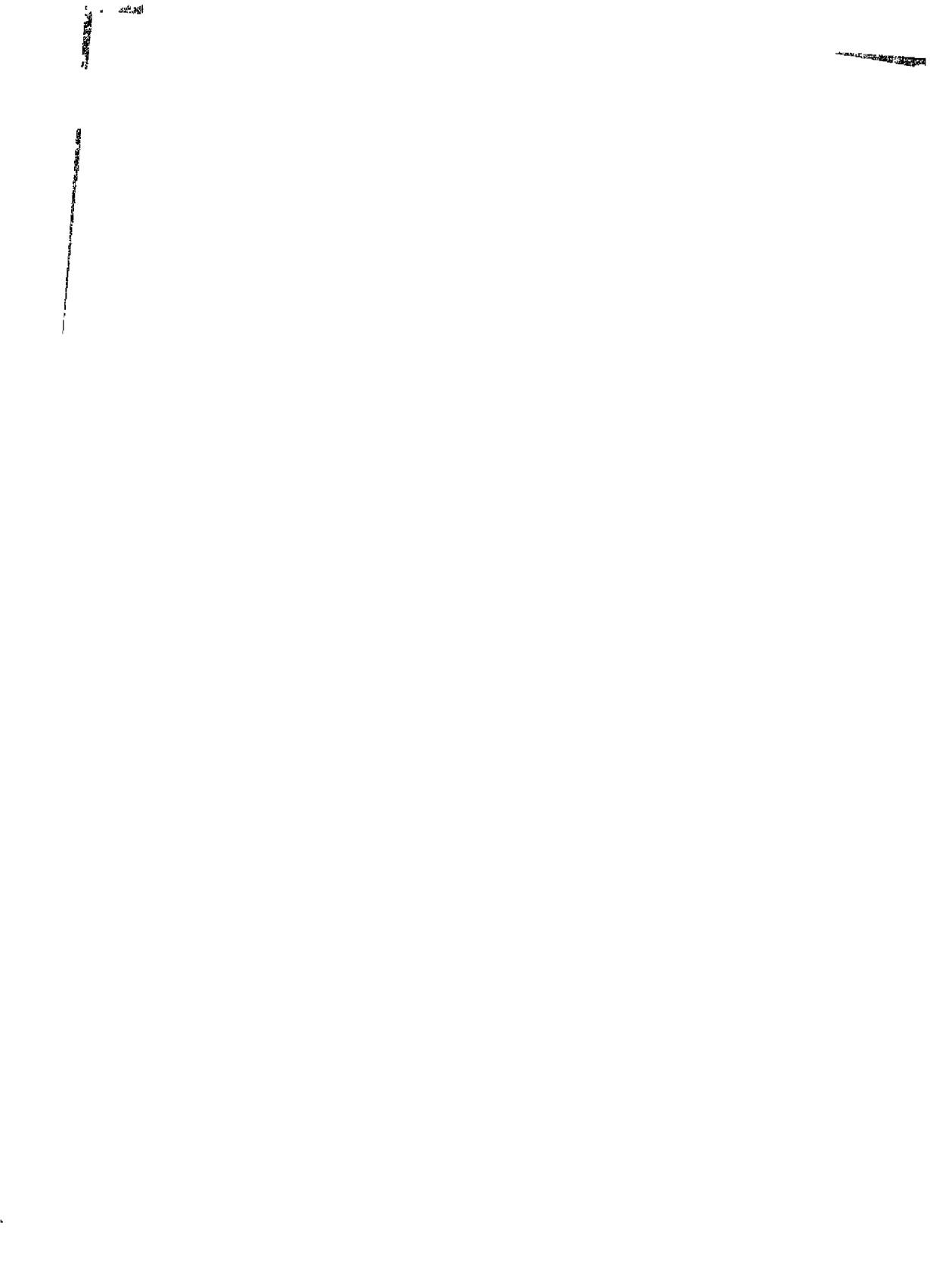
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Part Two

Class  
Formations in  
the Twentieth  
Century

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## The Social Character of the Indian Middle Class

• André Béteille

**A**ny discussion of middle-class values has to be based on an examination of the size and composition of the middle class—that is, if we are to understand such values as expressing—and at the same time as defining—a particular social environment. In the approach followed here, the structure of society and the values characteristic of its members are viewed as closely and dialectically related; and what applies to society as a whole applies also to its principal classes and communities. Further, where the values are vague, nebulous and mutually inconsistent, it is operationally convenient to begin with a structure of the society or social class in question before proceeding to an examination of its characteristic values.

The first and larger part of this essay will be devoted to what may be described as social morphology and the remainder to social values. I will try to define the middle class in terms of its principal demographic, economic and social characteristics, and then turn to its internal differentiation. The class we are dealing with is not only very large but also highly differentiated internally to such an extent that it may be more appropriate to speak of the middle classes than of the middle class in India. I shall stress repeatedly its heterogeneous social composition so as to remind the reader of the hazards of drawing hasty conclusions about its social values.

The recent shifts in economic policy in favour of privatization, liberalization and globalization have generated a wide interest in the middle class's size and composition and its social values. While acknowledging a major economic role, it is not exaggerating that economic

policy can do to alter the currents of social life. Economic policy, whether designed to enhance state control or to encourage private initiative, has both intended and unintended consequences. Changes in the character of economic classes and in their values follow rhythms that are quite different from those that mark changes in economic policy. Moreover, the economic reforms of the last ten years have themselves gone through unforeseen oscillations.

The expanded role of the market has been welcomed by some members of the same class and opposed by other members of the same class. While such differences of perception and orientation are easy to illustrate, it is difficult to relate them systematically to the deeper differences of location within the middle class. It will be naive to believe that all sections of the Indian middle class have now acquired a uniformly positive attitude towards the market or a uniformly negative one towards the state. Here one would expect differences, and perhaps significant differences, between academics, civil servants, clerks and school teachers on the one hand and business managers, traders and shopkeepers on the other.

A full and proper understanding of the social situation of the middle class, including its social values, will require some attention being paid to the other social classes in the population, but those I will ignore except for a brief reference to the working class in the context of white-collar trade unions. The middle class in India is part of a relatively new social formation based on religion, caste and kinship. It will be impossible to understand the morphology, leave alone the values, of the Indian middle class without taking account of the pre-existing differentiation of Indian society on the basis of language, religion and caste. The most striking feature of the morphology of contemporary Indian society is the co-existence of social formations based on divergent, if not contradictory principles.

Middle-class values in India are difficult to characterize because they are still in a process of formation and have not as yet acquired a stable form. As such, they are marked by deep and pervasive antinomies by which I mean the contradictions, oppositions and tensions inherent in a set of norms and values. The antinomies characteristic of contemporary India tend to blur the distinction between the normal and the pathological. Middle-class values are often contradicted by the values of caste and community, and the same individual is pulled in opposite directions. Individuals frequently act in ways that they condemn in others, justifying their own conduct by the press of circumstance.

The antinomies to which I have just referred, create the ground for endless moralizing. Everything or nearly everything that is written about the Indian middle class is written by middle-class Indians. In writing or speaking about themselves, they tend to oscillate between self-recrimination and self-congratulation. Those who are opposed to the state attack the bureaucracy for promoting corruption, nepotism and inefficiency; those who are opposed to the market attack private enterprise for subordinating everything to naked self-interest and rank consumerism. It is difficult to write objectively and analytically about values as social facts if we view them from a lofty moral plane. In my observations on middle-class values in the concluding section I will try to approach the problem from the angle of the sociologist rather than the moralist.

The public discussion of the middle class in the last ten years has been driven largely by the media. There is hardly anything substantial on the structure of the middle class in the sociological literature. This is ironical in view of the intrinsic importance of the subject and the large size of the sociological profession in the country. In their studies of social morphology, Indian sociologists have devoted their attention to village, caste, tribe, sect, clan, lineage and family, but have had very little to say about the size and composition of the middle class. Studies of occupational differentiation, occupational ranking and occupational mobility, which have provided a solid ground for the discussion of the middle class in western countries, have so far had little attraction for Indian sociologists.

Historians have paid more attention to the Indian middle class but their accounts are partial and fragmentary, and tell us more about the past than about the present. It has come to be widely accepted that the great expansion of the middle class is a matter merely of the last ten or fifteen years. When actually did the expansion begin? With the liberalization of the economy ten years ago? Or with the big push in the growth of the public sector fifty years ago? If we had the data, we would be able to demonstrate the progressive, though somewhat uneven, expansion of the Indian middle class since the end of the nineteenth century.

The discussion of middle-class values is constrained by the absence of reliable and systematic data on the size and composition of the class. Estimates of its size vary from under 100 million to over 250 million persons. Those who maintain that the economic reforms of 1991 mark a turning point in the course of India's social history are

inclined to overestimate its size and significance in the present and to underestimate them in the decades before the nineties. Others who assign only a limited social significance to those reforms are likely to take a more moderate view of its current size and recent expansion.

The lack of reliable and systematic empirical material means that the discussion of the middle class proceeds more by the method of apt illustration than by that of controlled analysis. This serves reasonably well, the purpose of making judgements on middle-class morality, but it does not lead to any clear conclusion about the changing social positions of the persons whose morality we condemn or extol. An important reason for the paucity of satisfactory data is the lack of an agreed conception of the middle class. In social analysis, concepts and data are related to each other in a mutually reinforcing way. Concepts become clearer when the data permit progressively refined distinctions, and the clearer the concept is, the easier it is to collect comparable and relevant data.

There is no single criterion for defining the middle class. Occupational function and employment status are the two most significant criteria, although education and income are also widely used. From the present point of view, the most important occupational division is between manual and non-manual work, typically middle-class occupations being non-manual ones. Employment status divides the population into employers, employees and the self-employed (or own account workers). The divisions of occupation cut across those of employment status since a doctor for instance, may be self-employed, an employee in a public hospital or even an employer in his own nursing home. The middle class as conceived here consists predominantly of employees although it also includes self-employed persons and a sprinkling of small employers. It would hardly be reasonable to assume a single and homogeneous universe of values in such a large and socially diverse population.

In the west, the middle class began to be perceived as a distinct social formation only in the nineteenth century. Till the end of the eighteenth century, people spoke of society generally in terms of estates or orders rather than classes. Much of the nineteenth century was widely seen as that class or stratum which stood between the owners of land and capital on one side and those merely of labour power on the other. They were the self-employed or own account workers in both agriculture and manufacture, whose imminent decline and ultimate disappearance had been foretold by Marx. This is the 'old middle class' defined essentially in terms of the relations of production.

An alternative conception of the middle class places the emphasis on occupation, education and income. The core of the 'new middle class' consists of men (and women) who work in offices or similar locations in non-manual occupations that require some degree of formal education. The economic and political significance of this class or this segment of the middle class, in all modern societies is beyond dispute. The prospects of both economic development and democratic politics are intimately linked with its fortunes. Historically, civil society and its institutions have grown with the growth of the middle class.

The new middle class of salaried employees grew continuously throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and for a time its growth appeared in marked contrast with the decline of the old middle class of self-employed persons in manufacture and trade. But the latter did not disappear even in the advanced industrial countries. They have adapted successfully to new economic demands and have contributed much to the continuing vitality of the capitalist economic system. However, their social values are not identical with those of the new middle class defined by professional, administrative, managerial, clerical and other white-collar occupations. The discussion that follows will focus mainly on the latter and comment only incidentally on the former.

As indicated earlier, the new middle class is defined not only by occupation but also by education. The growth of a highly differentiated occupational system has been accompanied by a corresponding growth in the educational system. Education has become institutionalized to an unprecedented degree. More persons of both sexes spend more time, both absolutely and relatively, in school, college, university and other specialized institutions of education and training than they ever did in the past. The expansion and institutionalization of education has been closely linked with the emergence and growth of a new occupational system. Education provides not only the skills but also the credentials required for entry into middle-class occupations, and one's educational career often foreshadows one's occupational career. But it does not have the same significance for self-employed persons in manufacture and trade that it has for salaried employees or for professionals such as doctors and lawyers, whether salaried or self-employed.

The middle class, in the sense given to it above, began to emerge in the west at the turn of the eighteenth century. In Britain, France and Germany it expanded throughout the nineteenth century, displacing the old social system based on 'estates' or 'orders'. It had a distinct

pattern of growth in the United States where it did not have to contend with any *ancien régime* based on a hierarchy of estates. Today, the middle class is a worldwide phenomenon, although its size, composition and relationship with other social classes and categories differs, from one country to another. In the erstwhile Soviet Union (and other socialist countries in eastern Europe) it was known as the 'intelligentsia' and regarded as a 'stratum' rather than a class. But the Soviet intelligentsia, no less than the western middle class, grew along with a particular occupational system and the educational system associated with it.

In India, the origins of the middle class derive not so much from an industrial revolution or a democratic revolution as from colonial rule. For the radical intellectual, the Indian middle class bears the double taint of association with capitalism as well as colonialism. It was colonial rule that created the modern office, the habitat of the white-collar worker or 'babu' and the modern professions such as law, medicine, engineering and journalism. It also established the first modern universities, and the law colleges, the medical colleges and engineering colleges to provide training and certification for entry into middle-class occupations. Unlike in the west, in India this required some knowledge, if only a smattering, of a foreign language.

No doubt there were self-employed persons in manufacture and trade before the developments referred to above began. But it is doubtful that they constituted a middle class in the sense in which the term is now used. The social order within which such persons lived and worked was an order of castes and communities rather than of classes. The middle class does not exist by itself but within a system of classes which is very different from a system of estates or of castes.

An educated middle class, increasingly conscious of its identity, began to take shape in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was confined at first to the presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras where the first universities as well as the first medical and law colleges were established. In India, the emergence of this middle class constituted a bigger break with the traditional social order than in the west. The demands of life and work in the college, the office or the profession were very different from those of the traditional social order.

Despite its steady growth since the middle of the nineteenth century for a hundred years or so the Indian middle class was a small island—or rather an archipelago—in the middle of a vast population organized on a very different basis. Still its significance in the life of the nation

was not inconsiderable. It spearheaded the nationalist movement and the members of the Constituent Assembly were predominantly from it. It gave shape to and was in turn shaped by the modern institutions of Indian society such as universities, laboratories, libraries, newspapers, hospitals, banks, municipalities and political parties.

The Indian middle class has grown steadily in size in the last fifty years. Although still a minority in the population, it is no longer a minuscule minority. The growth and differentiation of the middle class has been one of the most significant developments in Indian society since independence. It is not only internally differentiated but also internally stratified. The bases of internal stratification in the middle class are occupation, education and income, and not caste and gender as in the traditional hierarchy. The social ascendancy of the middle class is altering the traditional relations among castes and between men and women. In modern institutions such as hospitals, banks and newspapers, it is no longer uncommon for men to be subordinate to women or persons of higher castes, to those of lower castes.

I would like to stress once again, the internal differentiation of the middle class which is considerable even if we confine ourselves to that segment of it which comprises salaried employees in non-manual occupations. This differentiation has to be considered on two axes firstly on the axis of occupation, education and income, and, secondly on the axis of language, religion and caste. Given the great multiplicity of languages, religions and castes in Indian society, the Indian middle class is certainly the most polymorphous in the world. No discussion of its values will be sociologically adequate unless it takes the polymorphous character of the Indian middle class into account.

Middle-class occupations cover a wide range from lowly non manual occupations to superior professional, administrative and managerial ones. Entry into these occupations is filtered through the educational system, and the differentiation of the occupational system is to some extent matched by the differentiation of the educational system. There are large differences of income between clerks, typists, telephone operators, stenographers and receptionists on the one hand and corporate lawyers, chartered accountants, neuro-surgeons, judges and secretaries to the union and state governments on the other. The differences in social and cultural capital between them are as large if not larger. These differences translate into differences in consumption patterns and lifestyles.

Even with a single broad occupational category there may be large differences of material, cultural and social capital. There is all the

difference in the world between a science teacher in a mofussil college and a research scientist in the Indian Institute of Science; or between a small-town advocate and a member of the Supreme Court Bar. Some Indian professionals will be at home anywhere in the world; others will be out of place outside their provincial town. It would be unreasonable to expect all of them to have the same attitude towards let us say, women's place at home and at work, or strikes by university teachers, or the free entry of multinationals into the country.

The manual/non-manual division is important for the middle class identity, but more so in some countries than in others and perhaps nowhere more than in India. Even in India the division is less clear now than it was fifty years ago. Till then few manual workers received wages that equalled the salaries of even the lowliest non-manual employees; and they were not expected to have had any formal education. Before independence it was unusual among middle-class Bengalis, for even a child to use the honorific 'aap' in addressing a manual worker of no matter what age. These disparities have been reduced somewhat, although the middle classes remain very conscious of their schooling and of not having to depend for their livelihood on any kind of manual work.

Several factors have contributed to reducing the disparity between manual workers and the middle class. As literacy becomes universal and education more widespread, the disparity is bound to diminish, this happened in the west between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and it is now happening in India. Secondly, with technological advance, the nature of manual work itself undergoes change. It becomes less unclean and less onerous and calls for more skill and training. More and more individual occupations become difficult to classify as either clearly manual or clearly non-manual. Manual workers themselves become internally differentiated, and the skilled ones among them tend to adopt some elements from middle-class lifestyles and value orientations. This is the 'embourgeoisement' of the working class, familiar to students of the subject in Britain.

Nor is it simply the working class that acquires some of the orientations of the middle class, the latter also learns something from the former. Trade unionism, which despite its middle class leadership, was largely a working class movement in the past, has increasingly extended its appeal to white-collar workers. Nor is militant trade unionism confined only to clerks and other subordinate non-manual staff. There are now officers' unions and unions of engineers, doctors, academics and others which organize industrial action of a kind.

that was characteristic only of manual workers in the pre-independence period

Trade unionism brings some sections of the middle class close to the working but divides them from other sections of their own class. It is obvious that trade unionism does not have the same appeal for self-employed persons in manufacture and trade that it has for salaried employees in public institutions. Their economic interests are different and their social and political orientations are also different. No matter what impact the economic reforms may have, it is difficult to believe that they will lead to the demise of middle-class trade unionism in the foreseeable future. While we have little systematic data on the subject, trade unionism appears to have become a part of the culture of at least some sections of the middle class.

I have so far discussed the composition of the middle class in terms of characteristics that would define it as a class in any society and not just Indian society. But in India the social identity of the middle class person or family is defined not only by occupation, education and income, it is defined also by language, religion and caste. It is the co-existence of these two sets of divisions, new and old, that gives the Indian middle class its distinctive character. The Indian middle class is unique not so much because of any peculiarity of the Indian occupational or educational system as because of the peculiar way in which class is intertwined with caste and community in contemporary Indian society.

At the time of independence, public spirited Indians believed that the old social hierarchy would recede into the background and a new dispensation would emerge in which individuals would be judged according to merit and ability and without consideration of caste and community. At that time public opinion was strongly in favour of the state playing an active part in bringing this dispensation into being. Certainly, new social formations have become increasingly prominent, and both state and market have contributed to their development, but the old formations have not disappeared. This is in keeping with the Indian social tradition which allows the continuance of old elements despite the adoption of new ones even when they are mutually inconsistent.

It will be far from the truth to say that the old social hierarchy remains exactly as it was. It has changed continuously in the last hundred years although no one will say that it has disappeared without leaving any trace. Caste discrimination and gender discrimination are still practised but less extensively and less openly than in the past.

They have lost a great deal of the legitimacy they earlier enjoyed. Even where they are upheld by custom, the law has turned against them whereas in the past they enjoyed the support of both custom and law.

Although traditional hierarchical practices relating to caste and gender have weakened uniformly in all its segments and strata, I will give two examples of changes in the bases of the traditional hierarchy—the first relates to commensality between castes and the second to age at marriage for women. In both respects the change has been most marked in the middle classes and particularly among those with university education and in professional, administrative and managerial occupations. The rules of commensality, which protected the boundaries between castes and were most zealously observed among the upper castes, have weakened most among the middle classes. Again, the age at marriage for women has risen the most among middle classes whereas pre-puberty marriages were till the beginning of the twentieth century most common among the upper castes.

The decline of the hierarchical aspects of caste and gender among the middle classes has not brought an end to inequality. Indeed, new inequalities have been generated by the occupational and educational systems. There is no modern society in which all occupations enjoy equal remuneration, esteem or authority, and education leads to both individual mobility and the reproduction of inequality, paradoxical as this may sound. Not only are new inequalities being generated by the middle class, these inequalities sometimes reinforce the old ones. But nothing will be gained in our understanding of contemporary Indian society if we fail to distinguish the inequalities of occupation, education and income from those due to caste and gender.

What we are witnessing in India today may be described as the passage from a harmonic to a disharmonic regime. The practice of inequality is common to both types of regime, but the first accepts hierarchy as its governing principle while the second adopts equality. The difference is on a plane of values rather than organization. Modern societies the world over are egalitarian in aspiration but accommodate inequality in organization, whereas pre-modern Indian society accepted inequality between castes and between men and women as a part of the natural scheme of things. The passage from one type of regime to the other is a difficult one, and the conflict of norms and values—or the anachronies of society—become particularly marked where the adoption of radically new laws is not matched by a significant change in established social habits and practices.

Indian society was not the only hierarchical one known to history but the social hierarchy in India was more comprehensive, more deep rooted and more long standing than any other. The middle class as we have noted, is permeated by inequality, but the middle-class orientation to inequality is different from that of a caste- or estate based society: it is competitive rather than hierarchical. It stresses achievement and success and the need to push ahead without too much consideration of the cost to others, and it rejects the view that one is obliged to remain in the station to which one was assigned at birth. To those who accept the social hierarchy as a part of the natural scheme of things, middle-class values are bound to appear as callous and self-serving.

In India the hierarchical relations between castes and between men and women were expressed in the ritual idiom of purity and pollution. It is perhaps the most compelling idiom created by human ingenuity to keep a social hierarchy in place. It is not as if the ideas of purity and pollution were unknown to other cultures, but in India they are elaborated and systematized—one is tempted to say rationalized—to an unusual degree. While the rules of pollution were all pervasive, they bore most heavily on the weakest sections of society notably untouchables and women. The former were restricted, sometimes with the use of force, to occupations considered especially defiling and denied access to public places such as temples, wells and even the residential quarters of the 'clean' castes. Women, particularly of the upper castes, were segregated during their monthly periods and their purity was protected by their being made to marry early, preferably before the onset of puberty.

The whole idiom of purity and pollution which was the cement as it were of the old social hierarchy is antithetical to middle-class modes of life and work. It is impossible to organize work in a modern office in conformity with that idiom. Social exclusion on grounds of ritual defilement, if practised consistently, will bring to a standstill the work of any modern institution, whether a bank, a laboratory or a newspaper. For all its many sins, it was the middle class that first grasped the significance of this and took the initiative in discrediting the rules of purity and pollution. It may have done so in its own interest, but the social consequences of the move have been far reaching. The modern system of education, so closely linked to the fortunes of the rising middle class, made a notable contribution to it. What evidence there is, shows that if there is one place where untouchability has

d to be practised in rural India it is the village school

I have spoken above of the middle class, but my remarks apply in particular to the new middle class and especially to those in professional, administrative and managerial occupations. It is they who have played the leading part in undermining traditional attitudes towards caste and gender. The business community, whatever its economic achievements might be, has been on the whole socially more conservative in regard to both. I would go further and say that clerks and school teachers, particularly in the metropolitan cities, have undergone larger changes in social attitudes and orientations than self-employed artisans and traders, and white-collar trade unionism may account for part of the difference.

The aspirations of the new middle class centre typically around the career. To make a successful career is one thing from the middle class point of view, but to be a careerist is not. Being a careerist means making compromises, cutting corners and putting self before others. Middle-class careerists exist wherever the middle class exists, but they are perhaps more egregious in a newly emerging middle class than in one that is well established. In India, members of the middle class, whether in office, service or profession, freely violate rules which they sanctimoniously expect others to observe. It is not easy to judge whether this is done more commonly in India than elsewhere, or to what extent it is done because middle-class modes of work and life have not yet acquired a settled form in this country.

What appears as the lack of values in the Indian middle class is often the result of a conflict of values rather than their absence. Helping a nephew or a son-in-law to get a job or a promotion is certainly a denial of the middle-class value of careers open to talents; but it is at the same time an affirmation of a different kind of value. The average Indian, of no matter which class, is obedient to the values of kinship, caste and community. It is too much to expect him to abandon old loyalties and values altogether simply because he has become a member of the new middle class. Helping one's nephew or one's son-in-law in his life and work would be a commendable and not a reprehensible act in the traditional social order. The conflict of norms is much more acute in public institutions than in private enterprise where the same commitment to imperial rules, irrespective of the claims of kinship, caste and community is simply not expected.

It is true that the middle-class Indian is often a careerist who will put self before others in securing a job or promotion, or in seeking material advancement generally. But he will also neglect the duties of his office or profession in order to secure a match for his niece or

attend to his aunt's medical treatment. This naturally makes him appear in a poor light to the moralist. But, instead of moralizing over his misdeeds, we might try to examine objectively and dispassionately the antinomies in the social environment by which he is governed.

An important consequence of the antinomies just referred to is the poor health of our public institutions. Everybody laments the decline of those institutions, and everybody blames the middle class for it. The generation that saw India pass from colonial rule to independence expected a bright future for the country's new institutions, but their expectations have been largely, though not wholly, belied. Our universities do not function well when they function at all, our hospitals are crippled by periodic strikes by doctors, our banks are mismanaged and hamstrung by obsolete rules, our civil service is ponderous, slow moving and inefficient, our political parties are riddled with factions. In India there is never any lack of subjects to complain about.

The modern institutions, whose health and well-being is in the care of the middle class, operate in an adverse social environment. That environment is permeated by hierarchical values and by the divisions of language, religion and caste. These divisions and these values are not the creation of the middle class but they form a part of its existence and environment. How far it will be able to steer the modern institutions through an adverse social environment, and whether it will be able to do so without succumbing to it, only time will tell.

## Middle-class Values and The Creation of a Civil Society

• Pawan Varma

The emerging middle class in India is a very visible entity specially in metropolitan centres, where it is characterized by buoyancy, growth and ambition. The question that we will seek to examine is whether this middle class is capable of nurturing, or creating, a value system which can promote a civil society that encompasses in its upwardly mobile thrust all sections of Indian society.

This is a relevant question to ask to a society and a culture which is the end product of a 5000 year old civilizational continuity. The issue here is not merely of mechanical economic productivities, but of values which contribute or enrich the social capital of a society and a nation. In a developing country like India, with glaring and deeply entrenched social and economic inequities, the creation of a caring and concerned civil society is to my mind a *sine qua non* in equitable development that is able to touch the lives of not only the relatively privileged and better endowed citizens, but of the masses as a whole.

Thus, the question whether Indian society, and specially the more visible middle class segment of about 200 million people, has the ability to create such a civil society, is not merely one of academic evaluation. Indeed, the very success of India in the new millennium is, to my mind, premised on the answer to this question.

There are several factors which would cause us to be less than entirely sanguine about whether the Indian middle class, as it exists today has the capacity for the creation of a decent civil society. First in any society the ability to balance the interest of one segment with

that of others is based on the assumption that individual good is linked to overall well-being. In other words, such a premise accepts that all the segments of society are interlinked and no section can prosper in perpetuity without taking into account the well-being of the whole. But, among the educated and relatively privileged classes in India there is almost the acceptance of the assumption that India is divided into two parts—one India that reflects and must cater to the upwardly mobile aspirations of the middle and elite classes, and a second India often called Bharat, which is doomed to remain at the periphery of the relatively affluent India. Indeed, the progress of India, as against that of Bharat, is often measured, by those who constitute India, by the *distance they are able to put between themselves and the deprived and backward space of Bharat*.

To fully understand why this has come to be, we need to go beyond the surface figures of routine statistics and try and understand the psyche of the Indian middle class. In this paper, an attempt is made to try and segregate the many different elements which have finally come together to produce one of the most socially insular middle classes in the world.

A striking feature of the Indian middle class is that it is largely immune to the transparent deprivation around it. As per official statistics, close to 300 million people live below the poverty line. The poverty line must be one of the starker definitions of deprivation in the world. It essentially means that over 300 million go hungry to bed every night, night after night, week after week, month after month, year after year, in India. Another 300 million people hover just above this poverty line—one death in the family or one accident and the entire family dips below the poverty line. We are thus facing a situation where 600 million people or so—more than the combined population of the USA, Canada and west Europe—live in a situation of abject poverty and denial. The statistical nightmare does not end here. India today has the largest number of deaths due to malaria. The largest number of patients suffering from tuberculosis live and die in India. Every three minutes, a child in India dies of something as common as diarrhoea. Other indices are also a matter of deep concern. By any reckoning, more than one-third of the population of India is illiterate even today. Female illiteracy in some states is as high as 70 per cent. Sixty per cent of the people of India have no access to electricity or piped water. One-third of the capital of India does not have latrines.

If this is the degree of deprivation in India, why is it then that it is largely unnoticed by its middle and elite classes? This is the

civilizational question before us when we seek to determine whether the middle class in India today can build a civil society, which alone can ensure its own future prosperity in the long term. My suspicion is that the middle and elite classes are essentially morally neutral to inequity. They are unable to correlate the magnitude of the crises—so transparently unfolding around them—to their own world and to their future aspirations. When they read statistics, they believe that these belong to some other country, some other planet or some other universe. They are unable to accept that these constitute an indivisible part of their own world.

Second, another debilitating aspect of the Hindu ethos is the tremendous emphasis it places on a very narrow notion of self. This is not, in all circumstances, an unredeemed weakness. At the level of philosophy, and metaphysical fulfillment, this notion of self presupposes the absence of dogma and porousness to the plurality of truth which is truly a unique feature of Hindu philosophy. However, at the level of the individual and society, this very notion prevents the creation of a sense of community, and a common synergy, that could help set in motion constructive and coordinated social action for the general good. Hindu religion is based on personal salvation. A devotee visits the temple and prays in isolation to a personal deity for personal *moksha*. This, perhaps, is also one reason which can help explain why some of the most well known Hindu temples are surrounded by the most unbelievable filth and squalor. But the devotee does not notice this physical environment. He or she is convinced, irrespective of the conditions around him or her, that he or she is entitled to pray for an individual release which is not in any way dependent upon the larger well-being around them. This would also explain why philanthropy and charity, while highly regarded at the theoretical level in the Hindu world view, constitute such a marginalized element in Indian society. Hindu sense of the self is also nurtured by the belief that each finite human being is essentially deserving of the situation he or she is in because of the *karma* or deeds performed in the past. There is, therefore, an acceptance of unacceptable inequality; and such an acceptance is based on a flawed interpretation of the theory of *karma*, which in reality is a dynamic intellectual construct for effective and detached action in daily life.

Third, this overdose of the self is further compounded by a generalized belief, by many, that personal effort in rectifying social malaises is of no consequence. The magnitude of the problem appears to be so great that the psychological inference is that however much a

person may wish to see things change, individual effort can really make no difference. This inference results in an escapism from reality, an escapism that does not bode well for involvement in the creation of a vibrant civil society. Furthermore, even those who are motivated to do something about things which are so manifestly wrong, are seriously handicapped by the absence in the Hindu social framework of a forum for community action that transcends castes and kinship loyalty. In Islam, there is a Friday congregation where the faithful meet irrespective of their narrower loyalties. In Christianity, there is a Sunday gathering which is based on the same premise. There is no counterpart of this nature in Hinduism.

This narrow notion of self has an additional aspect which merits further study. Not only are the Indian middle and elite classes in general disinclined to be concerned with community oriented action transcending narrow individual interest, but they are also convinced that personal misdeemeanor has no correlation to long term consequences or larger well-being. There is, no doubt, a growing realization for the need for greater ethics in society. But those who deviate from ethical conduct at an individual level do not believe that their conduct is in any way in conflict with their publicly stated support for the return of ethics to society. So, for instance, a large number of individuals in India's middle and elite class routinely pay or accept bribe, while simultaneously being vociferous on the need for greater honesty and ethics in society. They are genuinely convinced that the unethical aspect of their personal conduct will not in any way impinge either on the larger good of society, or on their own long term well-being and prosperity.

Such a behavioural trait is somehow linked to what [I suspect] can only be described as a generalized suspicion of altruism. Since most people believe that people act only in pursuit of their own self-interest, there is suspicion about those who appear to be acting not for their self-interest but for the larger interest. I have been told by workers in NGOs who sell greeting cards to raise funds for slum children, that for a card which costs as little as Rs 10, the buyer will ask them questions about their motivation and the end-use of this money for as long as 30 minutes. Their attempt is to try and see what is the self-interest of the public benefactor. There is an unwillingness to believe that people can act outside the constricted ambit of their own self-interest.

This attitude appears to be directly linked to the absence of role models that would help to counter such a suspicion. This is indeed ironical in a nation where the freedom movement was led by a man

recognized to be motivated by interests that completely transcended his own personal interests. A grateful nation conferred upon him volitionally, and with pride, the title of Mahatma—the great soul. But the example set by this Mahatma was not emulated by many after him, and, today, the degree of cynicism that has come to pervade public life has created a genuine famine of individuals who can inspire or motivate people to look beyond their narrow concerns towards the larger good of society.

There is little doubt that the success of democracy in India has been a bulwark, a check, to a system of institutional apartheid wherein the privileged systematically keep in abeyance the interests of the [numerically larger] disprivileged. Indeed, it is democracy which has ensured that those who are so deprived are able to obtain from the ballot boxes what the system will not otherwise yield. The progressive empowerment of the poorer and marginalized sections in India—in spite of the insularity and insensitivity of the middle and elite classes—is directly attributable to the progressive entrenchment of democracy. And yet, it seems that it is precisely the relative success of democracy which has created in the Indian middle class a partial alienation from democracy. The middle class is no longer in the driver's seat in Indian politics. It is an articulate and influential factor in democratic debate but it can no longer be complacent about its own place in the democratic process, or about its ability to recreate, after each election, its hegemony which it could earlier so effortlessly ensure. The masses may be deprived, but they are no longer quiescent or willing to be manipulated without demur to suit the interest of the ruling elite. A consequence of this is that the middle classes are shying away from the democratic framework. Voting patterns show that areas where the least number of votes are cast are those where the middle class is predominant.

This withdrawal from political space, this retreat from the public domain, is also due to a perception in the middle class that democracy only implies the casting of the periodic vote when elections take place. Democracy is not understood as a vibrant system in continuum where citizens work to ensure the compliance of promises made by politicians, and interact with community and social organizations to ensure the chastity and effectiveness of the democratic process. The Indian middle class individual is, therefore, a votary of democracy but only if it reinforces the interests of his or her own world. He is a participant in democracy but in diminishing ways and certainly not

in ways that strengthen the factors of community and public spirited action going beyond his or her immediate interests

It is true that in recent times, there has been a partial increase in the activities in the non-governmental sector as a result of action by individuals and organizations who are concerned about problems of poverty, illiteracy, disease and women's empowerment. But it is also true that these very welcome fledgling attempts by India's fragile NGO world are overwhelmed by a veritable explosion, a revolution in the media projection of an affluent world replete with the objects of desire that the middle and elite classes aspire for. In fact, any objective study which seeks to analyse the social insensitivity of the Indian middle and elite classes would need to closely examine the impact of the recent satellite revolution which has brought into the very bedrooms of the upwardly mobile classes the images of a consumerist world that effectively shuts out the realities of India. It is in this sense that some commentators have rightly argued that the advent of the new economic policies of 1991 have further widened the gulf between India and Bharat. This is not a criticism of the policies themselves for they were indeed needed after the failure of the ineffective socialistic rhetoric of the past. It is, however, a comment on the impact these policies have had on a class of people who were already predisposed to shut out images that did not conform to or reinforce their aspirational universe.

A factor closely linked to the media-fuelled consumerist revolution in the middle and elite classes in India is the disproportionate impact of western life style. There is nothing wrong *per se* in the attributes of a western lifestyle, but the worrying factor is that these are emulated so unthinkingly and effortlessly so as to completely erode the cultural roots of large sections of the Indian elite. For such an elite, the original cultural impulse then becomes restricted to the symbolic celebration of a few religious festivals and a complete ignorance of the animating philosophies and [often secular] wisdom behind such ritual. For instance, there is within Hindu philosophy, the recognition of the importance of concepts such as *paropkar* [public good] and *sewa* [public service], and the concept of giving back to society what society has given to us. But a culturally rootless generation in the Indian elite, mesmerized only by the consumerist aspects of a western lifestyle is quite singularly adrift from the well springs of ideological motivation of its own culture. What is truly unfortunate is that so much that is constructive in western culture, such as a greater acceptance of

community, and a more pervasive sense of civic responsibility, is not emulated. The emulation is unfortunate, not because the original is flawed, but because the process is mindlessly reduced to only overt symbols of superficial attributes.

All this brings us back to what I have already said, that the middle and elite classes of India are at present conspicuously ill-equipped to create a civil society. This is truly a matter of concern, for I am convinced that only a caring and concerned civil society can create the foundation on which a prosperous India can be built in the new millennium.

## The 'Grandes Ecoles' in France: From Republican Meritocracy to *Noblesse d'Etat*

• Christian Baudelot

The French Revolution, though indeed, the cornerstone for our nation's democratic and republican traditions, gave birth to a strange contradiction in the matter of education. The greatest minds of the period were charged with the task of modernizing the rather unique French school system, inherited as it was from the Ancient Regime, and thus the Catholic Church. However, the educational legacy of the Revolution was sadly lacking. It would take a century for a truly Republican primary school—free, *laïc*, obligatory and open to all—to develop. It is true that the men of the Revolution did have the best of intentions. In order to thwart the exclusively religious and humanist nature of French education, for instance, they tried to institute massive scientific and professional instruction. But sadly, these attempts did little to change the institutions.

Yet there was one contribution from this period that did change the face of French education. The two establishments created in 1794 by the most radical Revolutionary government, the Convention managed to survive all of the political and social reforms and counter reforms of the past two centuries. Even today, they continue to stand in all their glory: the most prestigious of our Grandes Ecoles, the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Ecole Polytechnique.

A peculiar heritage! The only lasting traces left by the Revolution in the matter of education are those institutions which are the least democratic. In fact, year after year, they serve only to produce and reproduce a new aristocracy: the 'Noblesse d'Etat', according to Pierre Bourdieu's famous theory. With one hand, the Revolutionaries dealt

a fatal blow to the monarchy and abolished the privileges enjoyed by the first two orders of the Ancient Regime—the clergy and the nobility. With the other, they created two institutions that would eventually turn out a new type of aristocracy, complete with its 'Grand Corps', its dynasties, its 'esprit de corps', its rights and its pride. Two hundred years later, the critics of the Grande Ecole are manifold as it was supposed to be a system founded upon democracy, equality and the abolition of privilege. The reality of today's Grande Ecoles must certainly not have been the intention of the Revolutionaries.

### THE RISE OF MERITOCRACY

At the end of the nineteenth century, the founders of the Third Republic promoted the school as the centre of their new society's values. These values concerned the individual, his liberty and his autonomy. The goal of instructors and their textbooks was to develop self-discipline among future citizens. Teachers aspired to instill in their pupils an ethic of civil responsibility. It was hoped that such an ethic would lead the citizen to discipline himself, to behave responsibly, to tame his basest instincts and emotions, and to accept what he could not control. Thus the textbooks never ceased to strongly denounce anything that could stand in the way of the individual's autonomy. Any situation where one's behaviour threatened his own independence was condemned. Drunkenness, anger and laziness were presented to children as the type of immoral behaviour that ran counter to true republican qualities—those that would render 'citizens in charge of their own mind and sure of their own judgement'.

The individual had to be in complete control of himself, because his destiny on earth depended only on himself, his work and his merits. The Republic recognised individuals. The only legitimate social distinctions should be those based on personal talent and achievement. To each according to his merit—this was the only inequality allowed in a society based on equal chance. The school was charged with putting this national meritocracy into practice. It was at school, from the earliest years onward, that a person learned to identify himself in terms of his ability and competence. He was taught very early to comport himself properly in a public space. It was out of the question that he should indulge in his personal tastes and passions while at school. As soon as one began his scholarly career, with its grand rituals, its jacobin, rigid structure and its anonymity, his merits were what identified him.

Classes were but a trial of his academic aptitude, the alaureate (Bac) an exam which served to sanction his merit at the national level. Finally, the entrance exams at the Grande Ecoles existed in order to select the nation's elite—based of course on an anonymous competition and individual excellence.

A century later, the school as an institution has become hegemonic. Its role has increased only within French social and economic life. Today, when one is seeking his place in society, the measure of his ability is determined by the degree he has attained, but also, by the school which conferred it upon him. As each individual is attributed his own educational 'value', the academic institution increases in importance not only in terms of the job market, but also in everyday life. This ever-expanding importance of the school in daily life is one of the major transformations in French social life since the Second World War.

There are many reasons for this new social fact, and indeed its origins far precede the '80 per cent high school graduates by the year 2000' challenge issued by politicians in the 1980s. In fact, its roots lie in the very first years of economic growth (the '30 Glorious Years') and after the oil crisis of the 1970s, it was accelerated by the rise of unemployment. For those in charge of the economy, an emphasis on education became a way of providing the country with a highly skilled workforce, which would in turn help to modernize the French economy. Only then would France be able to compete with her economically stronger rivals. The German and Japanese models convinced French economists of the validity of the American theory of human capital. Education became a factor in global economic growth, while also representing financial benefit to the individual. In short, education came to be seen as a worthwhile investment.

With the oil crises came the campaigns against homelessness and unemployment. More than anything, it was this element of 'battling the crisis' that convinced families—even the most disadvantaged of them—to take action. The idea that the likelihood of unemployment is inversely proportional to one's level of education quickly spread and was taken to heart. Facing a withering job market into which fewer and fewer young people were being accepted, everyone understood that higher education was the only safeguard against joblessness.

Besides these two economic factors was a third one, this time of a political nature. The extension of higher education to all corresponded

to the educational ideology of the founders of the Third Republic. There was a wish to fill the rather shameful gap that existed between the ideal of equality proclaimed in the glorious crests hung in the school's entrance, and the reality of social segregation which existed within its walls.

Moreover, prolonging the period of study went hand in hand with two other new social tendencies: the social promotion of one's children and the increase of women in the workforce. One of the many transformations undergone by French society in the past century and a half has been the growing role of education as an issue within the family and within the parent-child relationship. A child's academic success has become the great family concern. It is part of an ethic of promotion and autonomy; the role of the older generation is to ensure that their progeny experience a better lifestyle than they did. It is not a question of direct transmission of property and possession although parents should help their children to succeed, they should not simply install them in a readymade, inherited career. In return, young people should feel no right to their parents' property and possessions. In this way, the new familial ethic can be understood as that of a modern economic investor. If one gives his child a solid education, providing help at appropriate moments, one ensures that they have a better lifestyle than one's own. The value placed on individualism, made possible by economic growth, goes a long way in forming this logic of investment in the matter of education.

And so this investment in education becomes the point of convergence for several different ethics, whether individual, collective, economic or social (Baudelot Establet 2000):

The familial ethic which recognises the individual

The productivist ethic, which values information and investment, and thus future generations

The republican 'meritocratic' ethic, which emphasizes academic competition.

Has the school proved worthy of all this moral and material investment? Has the reality conformed to the ideals? A social and historic reflection on the case of the Grandes Ecoles might bring us closer to the truth. Situated as they are at the summit of the academic system, and functioning along a logic of super-selectivity, the Grandes Ecoles bear witness to a curious by-product of the Republican ideology. Republican meritocracy gave birth, in fact, to a new 'Noblesse d'Etat'.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND MERITOCRACY

Because of the dual character of its organization, higher learning in France is different from that of most other countries. On one side there are the universities, on the other, the Grandes Ecoles. The former, having no formal entrance requirements, accept the majority of applicants having obtained their Bac. The latter, however, are ultra-selective, recruiting their 'pupils' by means of a competitive entrance exam taken by prospective students two or three years after the Bac. In the meantime, these students have been taking preparatory classes which have prolonged, in a very intensive manner, their secondary school studies. The preparatory classes are taught in, and thus administrated by, the secondary schools. Once made, the choice between two different types of post-secondary education—the Grandes Ecoles or the universities—is irreversible, as prospective students are oriented very early towards one or the other of these institutions.

This dual and dissymetrical structure must appear strange to the foreign observer. Diverse and hierarchical as they may seem, most university systems of the world can at least claim a certain institutional unity. The 'Humboldt' model of German universities differs profoundly from the British 'Oxbridge' model, which in turn is distinct from the Californian universities. But all these models resemble one another sufficiently so as to be able to conceptualize the entire institution under a single rubric: the University. Such is not the case in France, where the university constitutes only one part of post-secondary education, although perhaps numerically the more important. Each university system, in its own way, expresses the social organization and history of the country that produced it. This is true in France as well as in other nations. Indeed, it is the history of France's educational system, as well as the relationship it has had over the centuries with the Church, the State and the economic universe, that we must turn to, in order to explain this curious co-existence. How did it come to be that at the very summit of the school system stand two very different institutions—the Universities and the Grandes Ecoles—that are ruled by two very different social and intellectual philosophies?

At the beginning there was the Catholic Church. From 500 AD to the end of the eighteenth century, it progressively built a system of general education, whose main traits Emile Durkheim has identified. More literary than scientific, more humanist than historical, more formalist than realist, this type of instruction tended to focus on grammar, logic, literature and Greco-Roman studies. Its purpose was

to develop the morality of the student, rather than train him in a profession. It promoted a certain vision of the world. Unlike the educational systems of the Protestant countries (England and Germany), the French school always emphasized general education instead of technical training, the fundamental over the experimental, theory over practice, the abstract over the concrete. Relatively adapted to a rural and artisanal France, the French-style university had to change at the moment when the country's economic and political activity began to move in new directions. At last it had become necessary to turn out professionals capable of mastering scientific and technical knowledge, as well as management expertise.

Historically, the Grandes Ecoles were conceived in order to fill this gap: to train the executives and managers needed first by the State, then by industry, agriculture and commerce. The Jesuit Colleges and the universities, fashioned by the Church and thus heavily infused with humanism, were incapable of supplying technical and scientific experts.

From the beginning then, the Grandes Ecoles, were distinct from the University, essentially because of their professional orientation, their exclusively technical and scientific instruction, and their selective nature.

They were directly oriented toward the professions. Their mission was not to provide a general cultural education, but to effectively prepare their students to practise certain professions. Representatives of these professions were indeed very active and interested in the functioning of these schools. They often interceded directly, in the form of either practical training or alumni associations. In particular, they took it upon themselves to ensure that the subject matter remained up to-date and relevant to the continually evolving professions.

With a few rare exceptions, the vocation of the Grandes Ecoles was scientific and technical: their mission was to apply the sciences to the professions.

Very selective, they recruited their students by way of an anonymous entrance exam. Individual ability was, therefore, the principal criterion for recruitment. Evidently, this represented a break with traditional forms of recruitment to important posts, such as connections, co-optation, corruption, and so on.

The first Grandes Ecoles were founded under the Ancient Regime, at the end of the eighteenth century. These were generally superior professional schools (Prost 1968). The need for managing directors and more particularly engineers, was first felt by the State. This did not constitute a sincere concern on the part of the State about the

importance of science and technology in French society; if the State did intervene at this point, it was only to look after itself as the first entrepreneur of the country.

For example, it had to develop and maintain an effective army which can be considered an enterprise of sorts. Technical weaponry required personnel with specialised training. Schools were thus created to train officers of the Artillery (1720), military engineers (1749) gunpowder and explosives experts (17) and finally, under the Empire combined arms officers (St. Cyr, 1808).

Besides these military responsibilities, there were other tasks at hand for the State. The extension of French territory made roads an essential part of public service. Justified, then, was the creation in 1747 of the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées. As owner of what lay beneath the ground, the State was obliged to begin mining. The Ecole des Mines was thus founded in 1783 in order to train engineers to lead and control mining practices. These specialized schools having been created, the Convention took up the movement and founded in 1794 the two major Grandes Ecoles, the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Normale Supérieure. The former was charged with turning out engineers and managers qualified in several of the sciences, while the latter was to train secondary school teachers, university professors and scholars. All of these state schools, which were also called 'government schools' have contributed, over the past two centuries, to creating a French elite which has spread beyond the limits of the public sector. An intellectual elite, a scientific and technical elite, but also, inevitably an economic elite were called upon to lead the new aristocracy of finance and commerce.

When private industry began to feel the need for engineers during the first half of the nineteenth century, the reputation of the 'government schools' was already firmly established. Private enterprise thus sought to attract engineers and managers trained by these public schools and initially destined to work for the State. This marked the beginning of a practice called 'pantoufage', which would insure a passage of personnel between the highest levels of public and private enterprise. A certain number of highly qualified executives—trained by and supposedly for the State—would be drawn into the senior management of large private companies. All this made for a unique productive machine, which, led by executives trained by the State, would prove radically different from those of countries having a comparable level of development: the USA, the United Kingdom and Germany in particular.

democracy and equality. How a movement which began with the aim of suppressing the aristocracy ended by creating a whole new State aristocracy—complete with its privileges and dynasties—can be analysed in different ways.

Bottom up, it is interesting to examine in a precise manner the social conditions necessary for access to these schools. Were these prestigious institutions really open to students from all social backgrounds? Or rather, was it necessary to have accumulated a certain amount of economic, cultural and social capital, which could only be obtained in certain social milieux? Though it all took place within the very republican and meritocratic context of anonymous entrance exams, it seems that the preparation necessary for these exams implied a pre-established harmonious relationship between the institution and the social classes from which the grand majority of students were recruited. In effect, the institution and the social class share a set of values.

Top down, one wonders whether this perpetual reproduction of common values did not, in fact, lead the elite to close in on itself. Did the constant reproduction of this noblesse d'Etat from within its own ranks actually limit the renewal of the elite, by preventing 'new blood' from exercising the most important positions in the nation?

## RECRUITMENT THE CHOICE OF THE CHOSEN

Contrary to the ideology of equality so dear to the founders of the Third Republic, and far from operating within a true sample of the population, where all social classes are represented in equal parts, the recruitment process of the Grandes Ecoles takes place within a very small section of the social universe. This is just as true today as it was in the past. The schools which were supposed to ensure the promotion of the middle class have become the producers of a new aristocracy.

To prove this point, let us examine the social picture of today's 'normaliens', based on a study of five recent recruitments (1988–92). These five promotions account for 970 students (Baudelot, Matonti, 1989). The first imbalance appears immediately. 645 men, but only 325 women. It is mainly the recruitment of the scientific students that is responsible for this dissymmetry; although the literary school accepts roughly 51 per cent men and 49 per cent women, the scientific school counts 82 per cent men against 18 per cent women.

At first glance these 970 students appear socially homogeneous

Indeed 77.7 per cent of them have fathers working in upper management, the liberal professions, or in secondary and higher education, whether the students themselves are women (78.8 per cent), men (76.2 per cent); scientific (76 per cent) or literary (78.9 per cent).

This strong social homogeneity is reflected in the students' academic history: 80 per cent obtained their Bac with Honours (43.5 per cent) or First Class Honours (36.5 per cent), 69 per cent have a 'Bac C' in hand. Socially and academically similar, they are also—although to a lesser extent—geographically homogeneous: 40 per cent of them were born in Paris (19 per cent) or the greater Paris area (21 per cent).

The men in literary studies have, more often than the others, parents who are secondary school teachers, school administrators, or 'indeterminate' teachers (who, more often than not, teach in a secondary school rather than in a university). These students are also more likely than others to have a father in public administration or in the upper management of a private company. However, they are much less likely to be sons of engineers. Male students in the sciences, on the contrary, are more likely to have fathers who are university professors, scientists, and to a lesser extent, farmers, merchants and artisans. As for women in literary studies, they generally have fathers in high public offices or in upper entrepreneurial management. Women in the sciences, however, distinguish themselves from all of their colleagues by having fathers in engineering, in the intellectual and artistic professions, and even in the military.

But all of this is just a primary categorization. In reality, the recruiting of normaliens takes place in social contexts too particular for a 'catch-all' approach. In order to portray a more accurate representation, we have sub-divided these four professional categories (Table 2).

First of all, those relating to public service. In the first row, the services involving teaching and research are represented.

Second, those professions which find themselves at the crossroads of the public, private and independent sectors. These include the so-called 'liberal professions', even though today they sometimes operate in the public sector: doctors, lawyers, journalists and artists. We have on purpose included law professors and hospital doctors in this category, rather than among the teachers of higher education. It was thought that the importance of liberal tradition in these professions, as well as their members' principal and secondary spheres of activity, were such that it seemed more appropriate to place them in the social, rather than the intellectual category.

Finally, the 'popular' professions—farmers, merchants, artisans, employees and workers.

This leaves one category for retired or deceased fathers without indication of former profession, non-responses and unemployed fathers.

Children of teachers and entrepreneurial managers make up the lion's share of recruited students. If we add children of liberal, intellectual professions, these three categories take up 80 per cent of the social space.

Male, urban and heavily endowed with cultural capital (more important than economic capital, as the details of the professions reveal), the normaliens recruited over the past five years appear to come from a very restricted social environment. Paris, academia, and the intellectual side of the dominant classes.

The students of the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration are recruited from the same social milieux, with only a few minor differences.

From the 1980s onward, more than 75 per cent of these recruits have been children of upper level managers and teachers, thus imposing a homogeneity onto the plateau de Palaiseau no less remarkable than at the rue d'Ulm. However, within these two large categories, the Ena and Polytechnique recruits align themselves a little differently, as Table 2 illustrates.

There are fewer children of teachers and public servants, and more children of entrepreneurial directors, engineers and managers within the private sector: this is the main distinction between the two recruiting practices. The scientific students at Ens thus occupy an intermediary position between the literary normaliens and the polytechnic normaliens. On both sides of the Pantheon, more than 75 per cent of the students have fathers who are in upper management. However, Polytechnique students tend to come from the economic pole of the social ladder, whereas Ens students tend to come from the intellectual and cultural poles. An analysis of multiple constituents done on the student bodies of 84 Grandes, Moyennes and Petites Ecoles, shows that a primary axis—social selection—aligns the different institutions according to the percentage of their students coming from the dominant classes. Occupying the most extreme points of this axis are Ens and Polytechnique, together with Ena, Sciences-Po and Hec: in short, the schools of 'la grande porte'. A second axis shows considerable differentiation among the Grandes Ecoles themselves. For instance, establishments such as Ulm, Sèvres and Mines de Paris

*receive students endowed with more cultural capital than economic capital and who are extremely rich in academic capital, having parents engaged in the intellectual professions.* On the other hand, institutions such as Hec, Agro, Centrale and Ena accept students more endowed with economic capital than cultural, and who tend to be children of farmers, industrial managers, businessmen and private entrepreneurs. The Ecole Polytechnique is situated between these two groupings. Though it is perhaps inferior to Ens, the percentage of children of teachers and professors among its students remains considerable—more than 20 per cent. Once again, we see the social similarity among the recruits of these two Grandes Ecoles.

Due to a lack of consistent data, a comparison with Ena's recruitment cannot be completely precise. The statistics are a bit out of date (1972–82), and do not distinguish teachers and professors from public servants. Nor do they allow a distinction between upper and middle management. These statistical deficiencies are disappointing, as many students at Ens feel an affinity with Ena, and it represents a certain attraction to them.

Even more than those of the tenth or of the rue d'Ulm, the students of Ena come—not surprisingly—from the most privileged social backgrounds. Here, more than 90 per cent of the students have fathers who are either high-level civil servants, members of the liberal professions, or directors of private enterprises. A quarter of the students (25.1 per cent) entering Ena between 1972 and 1977, and nearly a third (30.1 per cent) entering between 1978 and 1982, have fathers who are upper-level civil servants. Moreover, with 15.5 per cent (1972–77) and 14.7 per cent (1978–82) of the students having fathers in the liberal professions, 'enarques' continue to resemble their colleagues at Ens and at X. However, the 39.3 per cent and then 48.4 per cent having fathers in industry or business—unfortunately we cannot subdivide this category into upper- and middle-management—brings Ena students closer to the polytechniciens than the normaliens. On the other hand, if we consider the children of high-level public servants (19.1 per cent) and of executives (8.1 per cent), there can be no argument that enarques come from social milieux more economically powerful than do the polytechniciens, and, of course, the normaliens.

This 'aristocratic' (or simply bourgeois) character of the Grandes Ecoles recruitment is not new. Thirty years ago, a young person born of the popular classes was twenty-four times less likely than another to enter one of the four Grandes Ecoles (Ens, Polytechnique, Hec, Ena). Today that same youth is twenty-three times less likely to

simplify, the inequality of access to the most prestigious Grandes Ecoles has remained stable over the years, while the inequality of access to the universities has greatly decreased. Indeed, thirty years ago, the child of a worker was twenty-eight times less likely than a child of a manager or a teacher to enter University; today, he is only seven times less likely.

### THE ENTRANCE EXAM, RITE OF AN INSTITUTION

Why does the social recruitment of the Grandes Ecoles take place within such a restricted sample of the population? The answer, perhaps lies within the values and practices which thrive in the preparatory classes. It is, after all, in these classes that the essential part of the selection process takes place, and it is also here that the future Grandes Ecoles students receive the moral and intellectual training.

These classes recruit students using a selection process which is tailor-made to attract students already possessing the qualities and values that are dear to the Grandes Ecoles (Bourdieu 1989). It has been said, in effect, that preparatory classes do nothing more than teach fish to swim'. Today, about 2,000,000 students are involved in post-secondary education, but only about 70,000 are enrolled in the preparatory classes. More than half of them are preparing for scientific study, 11,200 are preparing for the commercial Grandes Ecoles and 9800 are preparing for literary studies at one of the various Ecole Normale Supérieure. Only 38 per cent of these students are women. Again, we see an unequal distribution of the sexes: women make up 70 per cent of the literary classes; 50 per cent of the commerce classes, and only 25 per cent of the scientific classes. The results of the entrance exams will again accentuate this gender inequality. In fact, all students accepted into the preparatory classes are equally intelligent; two out of three are armed with a scientific Bac, even those who choose later to enter the literary classes.

The preparatory classes have been called 'total institutions' (Goffmann). A product of the Jesuit College and Napoleon's University, their primary effect is to cut off this minority of students from the rest of the world. Assembled in this separate space, preparatory students find that they resemble one another, particularly in their social and academic habits. This selective isolation ends up producing a very cohesive and homogeneous group, which will only be reinforced throughout the duration of the classes. Of course, adolescents are prone to homogeneity and cohesiveness with their peers, but the

preparatory classes have the effect of limiting their social scope. The stage is thus already set for the later acts of co-optation

However, such segregation has proven traumatising to those involved in the preparatory classes. Whether they pass or fail, what students remember most is the preparation and the entrance exam even more than the Grande Ecole itself. It can be described as a nearly primitive experience. Thirty, forty, even fifty years later, many still remember the subject of their written exam, their marks, their ranking and the name of their examiner. This is hardly surprising: the amount of work required of the students necessitates a full time commitment on their part. They do spend two or even three years of their lives there, and they are graded and categorized every single day. The number of class hours per week is high: 'Khagneux' and 'taupins' work more than sixty hours per week. Therefore, in this period of their lives, they do basically nothing but schoolwork. The preparatory classes also use a variety of institutional practices to effectively limit any outside existence of these legal adults who are nonetheless still called 'pupils'. Incentives, rules and controls. Substituted for their outside lives is a never-ending succession of intensive academic activities and exercises which, of course, are strictly regulated. The material being taught explicitly is not what is important, rather, it is the implicit lessons gleaned from the 'total' environment of the preparatory classes that count. To work under such stress teaches an intensive time-management strategy. Also, it teaches students to produce rapidly, and creates a trench-like atmosphere. 'It is often said that we learned nothing at Eton. That may be so, but I think we learned it well', said Lord Plumers in a speech to the 'Old Etonians'. This phrase actually only partially applies to the preparatory classes, as the scientific students are in fact duly trained in math, physics and chemistry. It is definitely in the science preparatory classes that students begin to attain real knowledge, rather than later in the Grandes Ecoles. Some essential knowledge is indeed transmitted to students in the preparatory classes. But the content is inextricable from the way it is transmitted. Urgency, competition, categorization, pressure and the necessity to promote one's self at all times: this is what is 'learned well' in the preparatory classes.

The separation and challenges of the preparatory classes are first and foremost conducive to integration. Surely it is not surprising that this closed world should bond together its inhabitants, creating a lifelong solidarity. The trials and tribulations experienced by these young students result in the development of a veritable language express ons: slang, word games and jokes pro ferate, crysta is ng

common values and acting as a code of recognition. It is in these classes that the solidarity and complicity of the elite are born. These will later be reactivated, as former classmates recruit one another into high-level public service, directorships in the world of private enterprise, politics: in short, the key positions in French society.

The entrance exam, the key element of the Grandes Ecoles system, has a ritualistic quality to it. It consists of dividing by two (at the 300<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>) a continuous series where individuals are separated by a quarter of a point. The breaking point thus separates for life the accepted from the rejected. Differences in quantity become differences in quality, especially between the two halves of the list. Its function is not only to separate those deemed acceptable to the institutions but also to publicly consecrate this new elite. This ritual thus has the power to turn a process of selection into an election, an exam into an initiation rite, scientific training into an 'asceticism', isolation into an initiatory retreat, and technical competence into a charismatic qualification. The exam is a way of imposing legitimacy upon the division between the last accepted student and the first excluded student, creating a veritable social divide between the two. The act of distinguishing between two different populations is an act of consecration, even of ordination (Bloch). Much like a dubbing, this ceremony institutes an order, and bestows upon it all the power of a social collective.

The symbolic effects are considerable and long-lasting, becoming in effect part of the student's personal identity. Upon acceptance into the institution, the student receives a 'title' once belonging to an alumnus. This title, which the student is immediately taught to value will figure in his student card and his CV, and will open doors for him in the eventual job market. More profoundly, the alumnus will treat this title as a principal component of his identity. Performance becomes essence, as witnessed by the use of the verb 'to be' in characterizing one's passage into the Grandes Ecoles: one is normalien, polytechnicien, centralien, énarque, etc. A certain French President, a former student of Ens, put it in these terms: 'One is born "normalien" as one is born a royal prince.'

#### THE 'GRAND CORPS' CLOSES IN ON ITSELF

In France, there is not much of a distinction between the social, cultural and academic profiles of political leaders, administrative elites and executives of the country's most important public and private enterprises.

(Suleiman 1995) Five 'grand corps' of the State, recruiting only forty young people per year, manage to 'produce' a third of France's leaders. If we take into account the mode of recruitment of the State's 'grand corps', two Grandes Ecoles, Polytechnique and Ena, produce almost half of the nation's most important entrepreneurial directors. The relationship between the Grandes Ecoles and the State 'grand corps' on the one hand, and that between the 'grand corps' and the highest entrepreneurial positions, on the other, results in an elite which is greatly homogeneous. But this homogeneity also confines this elite to a small circle of initiates who confiscate, for their own good, the exercise of power. Upper-level civil servants are part of networks which cross the borders between administration and politics, the Left and the Right, the private sector and the public. The list of the major political parties' leaders, with the exception of the PCF and the Front National, only confirms this idea. Michel Rocard, Laurent Fabius, Lionel Jospin, Jacques Attali, François Hollande, Jean Paul Huchon on the Left and François Léotard, Jacques Chirac, Edouard Balladur, Philippe Séguin, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Alain Juppé on the Right are all graduates of Ena, and are often in the same graduating year. Such connections are conducive to rotation, decision-making and the formation of public policy. But the uniformity of the system leaves little place for ideas, men and women not already part of this circle.

Two million students, 184 'écoles', which account for only 52,000 students.

### THE TYRANNY OF THE DIPLOMA

France, without a doubt, values academic success more than any other industrialized country. The diploma bestowed upon the very young person is a title that will stick to him for the rest of his life. A diploma from one of the Grandes Ecoles places the holder in a social orbit that assures him a career at the very highest level, at the very summit of the private and public sectors. This mode of recruitment isolates and protects an elite from a very young age. It also closes doors for other women and men, who, although educated elsewhere, are not any less apt at exercising a powerful position.

This mode of recruitment into the social elite by use of the Grandes Ecoles supposes that three conditions be met.

1. The French educational system will function perfectly as an instrument of categorization for a generation of children, the best

will really be the best, and will thus continue their education among the most prestigious Grandes Ecoles

- 2 This hierarchy of talent, revealed as it was during childhood and adolescence, will nevertheless last for the rest of the child's life
- 3 This hierarchy of talent was created while taking account of the skills and abilities one must display at high-level public service and in the top positions in private enterprise

Experience has proven that none of these three conditions are ever completely realized

TABLE 1. CREATION OF THE GRANDES ECOLES ACCORDING TO DOMAIN OF ACTIVITY AND DATE

	<i>Grande Ecole</i>	<i>Date of Foundation</i>
ARMY	Ecole d'Artillerie	1720
	Ecole du Génie	1749
	Ecole de Cavalerie	1764
	Ecole Militaire	1777
	Ecole militaire spéciale (Saint Cyr)	1805
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS	Ecole nationale des Ponts et Chaussées	1747
	Ecole des Mines	1783
	Ecole Polytechnique	1794
	Ecole Normale Supérieure	1794
INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERS	Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures	1829
	Ecole des Arts et Métiers	1803, 1806, 1811, 1832
	Ecole des Arts industriels	1854
	Ecole centrale lyonnaise	1857
COMMERCE	Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris	1820, 1825, 1869
	Ecole des hautes Etudes Commerciales	1881
	Ecole libre des Sciences Politiques	1871
ADMINISTRATION	Ecole Nationale d'Administration	1945
	Ecole des Eaux et Forêts	1826
	Ecole nationale d'Agriculture (Grignon, Rennes)	1848
	Institut National Agronomique (Agro)	1848, 1876

TABLE 2: FOUR PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES

<i>Father's occupation of Normaliens and Polytechniciens 1980-1989</i>	<i>Ens Ensemble</i>	<i>Ens Lettres</i>	<i>Ens Sciences</i>	<i>Ecole Polytechnique</i>
Teacher without precision	12.2	13.7	10.8	12.8
Professor or scientific researchers	12.4	11.5	13.3	5.8
High school teachers	4.5	4.6	4.5	1.3
Primary teachers	2.2	1.7	2.7	1.9
School Administration	2.1	2.7	1.6	0.0
<i>Total Education</i>	33.5	34.1	32.8	21.8
High ranking civil servants	1.1	1.7	0.6	0.9
Public Administration	4.9	7.1	3.0	3.9
Military officers and non-commis- sioned officers	1.6	1.7	1.6	3.0
<i>Total Government</i>	41.2	44.6	38.0	29.6
Legal professions	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0
Medical professions	8.9	9.5	8.3	9.5
Other journalistic and artistic professions	2.7	3.2	2.2	2.8
<i>Total professionals</i>	13.6	14.7	12.5	13.3
Business owners, directors and managers	4.0	4.2	3.7	7.5
Engineers	17.5	11.5	23.0	28.3
Top management, senior executives	8.4	10.3	6.7	8.1
Middle management and technical experts	5.5	6.1	5.0	4.3
<i>Total private enterprise</i>	35.4	32.1	38.4	48.1
Farmers, shopkeepers, craftsmen	3.8	2.4	5.2	6.4
Employees and workers	6.1	6.2	5.9	2.2
<i>Total working class, lower income category</i>	9.9	8.6	11.1	8.6
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

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## The Changing Social Structure of German Society and the Transformation of German Bourgeois Culture

• Winfried Gebhardt

The rise of bourgeois culture and its humanist values of education, its specific work ethic together with its moral principles of respectability, diligence and thrift occurred in the nineteenth century. It may be defined as being a result of the secularization process of the German version of the *Protestant Ethic*, expressing the lifestyle and self-identity of the bourgeoisie's newly emerging social class. Bourgeois culture, however, was not restricted only to the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois culture was regarded as *the representative culture* being open to all classes and even available to all mankind. Consequently, it also influenced the consciousness of all other social classes, particularly that of the working class, and served as a basis for the self-identity of the German people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, the nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries may be described as the bourgeois period in German history, interrupted only for twelve years, under the National Socialists' regime, which had produced an ambivalent attitude towards bourgeois culture.

During recent years, however, new developments have become apparent. We notice the unstoppable upward movement of the 'popular culture' which is being spread particularly by the new media. Popular culture focuses on different values and virtues, commonly described as post-materialistic, individualistic and sometimes even hedonistic.

In his epoch-making work called '*Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*' ('The Society of Pleasure'), Gerhard Schulze, one of the most famous German socio'ologists 'defines this development as an 'increasingly

event-oriented behaviour, as a growing obsession with action, fun, delight and similar activities. These values differ in a typical way from the bourgeois values and virtues. Such a change of values certainly affects the social structure of the German society, in ways which are characteristic of modern societies. Though in a modified way, processes similar to those in Germany are visible in many other western societies.

In the following pages let me explain this change of values and its effects on the social structure of German society. To begin with, I will briefly review the main trends contributing to the spread of social inequality in Germany after the collapse of the National Socialists regime. Thereafter, I would like to outline the theoretical patterns constructed by the German sociology in order to comprehend the structure of the German society. Subsequently, I will examine the change in both, the German bourgeoisie and the bourgeois culture. In particular, I will raise the question whether the change of values and the consequent changes of the social structure have to be assessed as a decline or as a transformation of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture.

FIGURE 1. OLD VALUES VERSUS NEW VALUES

<i>Old Values</i>	<i>New Values</i>
To fulfill one's duty (Pflichtgefühl)	To have some fun (Spaß)
Seriousness (Ernsthaftigkeit)	Coolness (Ungezwungenheit)
Social Responsibility (Soziale Verantwortung)	Personal Freedom (Unabhängigkeit)
Willing to make sacrifices (Opferbereitschaft)	Yearning for delight (Genussverlangen)
Family (Familie)	Friends (Freunde)
Thriftiness (Sparsamkeit)	Consuming (Konsumieren)
Humanist ideal of education (Bildung)	Self-Realisation (Selbst-Verwirklichung)
Contemplation (Kontemplation)	Entertainment (Unterhaltung)
Respectability (Seriosität)	Self-Performing (Selbstinszenierung)

## THE CHANGES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN GERMAN SOCIETY FROM SOCIAL STRATA TO SOCIAL MILIEUS

The Nazi period of twelve years, and the aftermath of a lost war brought about a radical change in the social structure of German society. The National Socialists' political measures had intentionally weakened not only the social position but also the cultural self-identity of the bourgeoisie. Further, the war-torn German industry, the high number of mainly male casualties, and the expelling, had led to the dissolution of the relatively homogeneous class structure of the Weimar Republic. The country was in a state of chaos. In other words, it was ruled by anarchy and a lack of any structure.

Nevertheless, the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany based on democratic principles, and the rapid economic growth—which has often been described as an 'economic miracle'—created a new, and, in comparison with other European countries, unique social structure. The German sociologist Helmut Schelsky called it the society of 'the levelled middle classes' (*nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*)

### *The Fifties and the Sixties: The levelled middle classes*

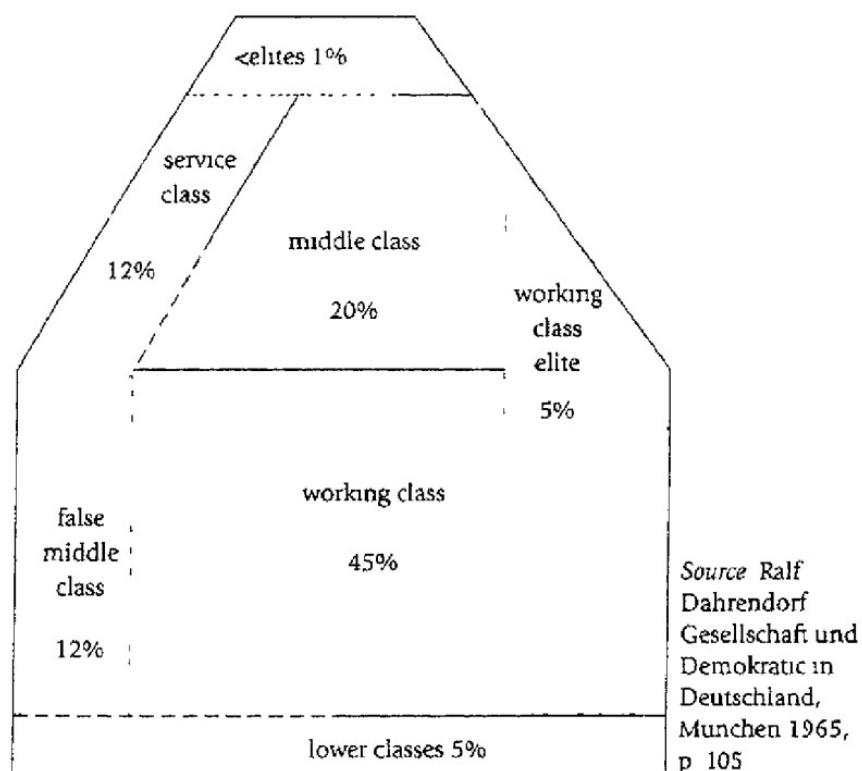
The levelling of social inequalities is the main characteristic of the levelled middle classes. A highly mobile social structure had emerged as a result of the war. Collective stepping up and down processes had brought about a levelling of the social classes and strata. Consequently, according to Schelsky, these processes resulted 'in a levelling of a relatively uniformly shaped social stratum being neither proletarian nor bourgeois but marked by the loss of class conflicts and social hierarchy' (Schelsky 1979, p. 327). Those who *ascended* were mainly manual and industrial workers, technical employees and administrative employees. Those who descended were mainly the members of the former bourgeoisie. A broad middle class was born offering equal political rights, extensive equality of opportunity and similar living conditions. The lifestyle was relatively uniformly shaped and dominated by mass consumption of material and intellectual goods.

Yet, the former bourgeois values remained as the mental basis of the levelled middle classes—of course in a modified way. The generation that substantially supported the economic reconstruction, developed a pragmatic orientation due to the experience gained during the period of National Socialism and the war. German sociology

describes it, therefore, as the 'sceptical generation' (Schelsky 1984), that showed only a rather limited interest in ideological debates and political issues. Instead profit-making interests were placed in the foreground. Achieving wealth and living a life of affluence was the widespread attitude. Though not exclusively, but still as a result of the American re-education, the newly established democratic order was accepted to a large degree. It experienced a rather conservative interpretation until the sixties.

As economic interest was of significant importance, economic indicators such as occupation, income and education consequently served as basic data in analysing the distribution of social inequality. Accordingly, Ralf Dahrendorf outlined the social structure of the German society in the Sixties as follows (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF THE GERMAN POPULATION IN THE SIXTIES

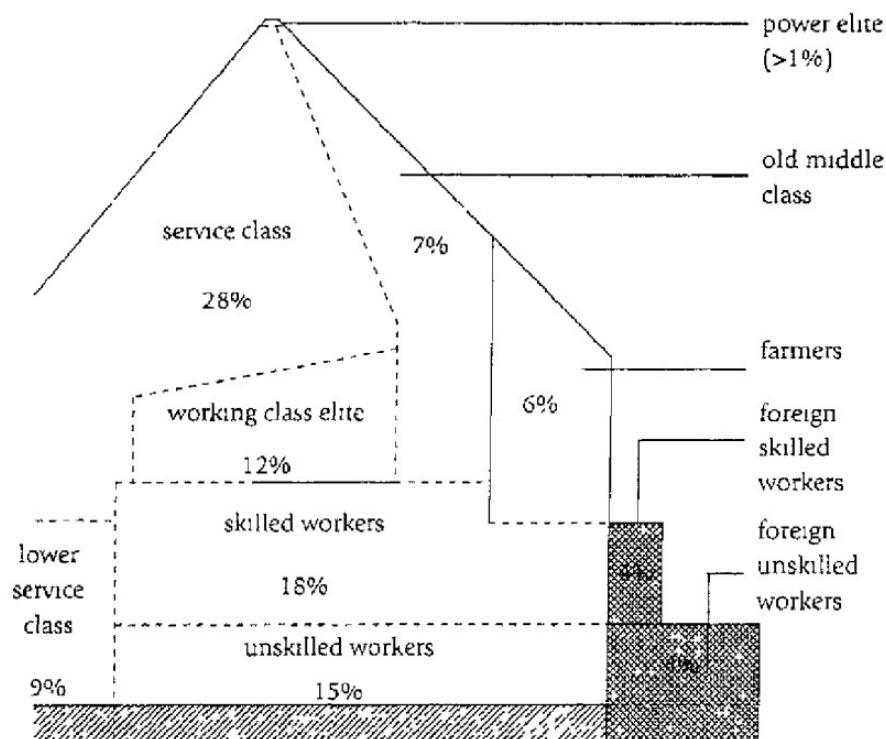


### *The Seventies: The beginning of diversification*

Today, the student uprising of 1968 is regarded as one of the great cultural upheavals in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Not only was the conservative political system of the Adenauer era but also the economic system of social market economy opposed at that time. Moreover, the moral values of the still existing bourgeois culture were abused, being 'secondary moral values' (Oskar Lafontaine). At the same time, these were confronted with the new values of self-realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*) and democratic participation. No doubt, the student uprising may be considered as an important breeding ground for the new culture but the effect was only felt in the immediate context. For the time being the social structure of the German society changed only to a small degree. Its structure became more complex, and consequently, less comprehensible. This was also because of a continuously growing social mobility. German society was moving more and more towards a system of groups which were less exclusive, less clearly defined, less widely separated in social levels, and not pursuing their narrow group interests with the same tenacity. These changes have been brought about by the steady increase in national income, the development of administrative and white collar occupations, social mobility, redistribution of wealth and income.

FIGURE 3. THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF THE GERMAN POPULATION IN THE EIGHTIES



greater equality of educational opportunities and other factors' (Bottomore 1962, p. 191).

*The late eighties and the nineties: The emergence of a new society*

The effects of the cultural revolution in 1968 became apparent only in the late eighties. A process of individualization had been set in motion by the 1968 cultural revolution, dissolving the traditional forms of social inequality and leading to pluralistic lifestyles and mind sets which were mainly focused on aesthetical and leisure-time interests.

In 1986, Ulrich Beck, one of the most outstanding sociologists of the Federal Republic of Germany stated

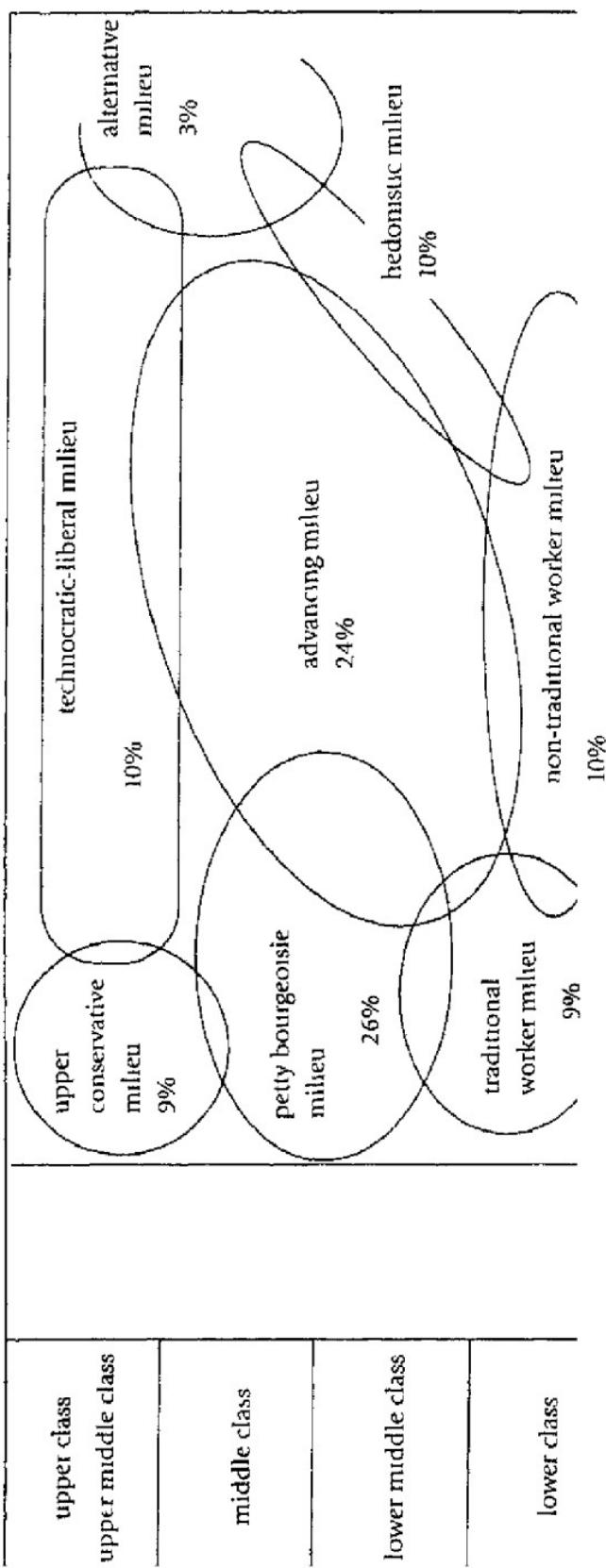
Despite the still continuing and newly emerging inequalities, we already live beyond a class society. We discover a dissolution of class identities and class commitments. At the same time, we notice a beginning of the process of individualization and diversification of lifestyles. This process avoids the hierarchical order of social classes and strata and calls the reality of this order into question (Beck 1986, p. 121)

Another phenomenon appears during the late eighties. The classic indicators like education, occupation and income are no longer used as the only instruments to make a distinction in the individuals' social status. Now the 'fine differences' (Pierre Bourdieu) gain importance: differences of value orientations, mind sets and life goals, differences in attitude towards work, leisure time and consumerism, towards family and partnership, and differences of future prospects, political opinion and aesthetic, lifestyles.

As a result, sociology, and especially research into inequality, have experienced a decisive shift. They abandon the so far recognized patterns of strata and classes and develop the so-called pattern of milieus which are constructed on two axes: vertically on the axis of occupation, education and income, and horizontally on the axis of value orientations, mind sets and lifestyles.

Two patterns of milieus are currently the subject of sociological discussions in Germany. One of these patterns has been constructed by sociologist Gerhard Schulze who subdivides the German population into five extensive milieus (Schulze 1992, pp. 277–335), three 'older' milieus (Niveau-, Integrations- und Harmoniemilieu) and two 'younger' milieus (Selbstverwirklichungs- und Unterhaltungsmilieu). The second pattern has been constructed by the SINUS-Institute in Heidelberg and is somewhat more complex (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: SOCIAL MILIEUS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY IN THE NINETIES



## THE DIVERSITY OF CONTEMPORARY GERMAN BOURGEOIS CULTURE

### *The process of individualization*

Undoubtedly, the reason for change in the social structure in Germany is the extensive process of individualization and its accompanying change of values. This development, however, is not confined only to the German society but is typical for all western societies. The extensive process of individualization, as Zygmunt Baumann, Michel Maffesoli, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Ronald Hitzler (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991; Baumann 1991, Hitzler 1998, pp. 81–9, Maffesoli 1996) put it, can be characterized more precisely by considering seven developments. Let me briefly explain these.

*First, the abandonment of class and strata orientation.* What I am speaking about is the individual's release from internalized social roles—which is generally observed—and an accelerated pluralization of living concepts of life.

*Second, the manifold quality of the social relations particularly in the field of family and partnership.* This refers to the increasing number of divorces, of partner changes within a marriage as well as outside marriage.

*Third, the growing biographic mobility.* In other words, the constantly growing social mobility and the ever increasing number of geographic migrations frequently caused by a change of occupation.

*Another development is the increasing flexibility of job careers and job biographies.* This means that, under modern conditions, one is forced to change one's occupation, in the course of one's life, perhaps even several times. Thus a continuous process of learning, retraining and further education have become a permanent necessity.

*Furthermore, a decreasing importance of traditional communities and an increasing importance of new communities.* I refer to the fact that traditional forms of community such as family, relationships and neighbourhoods lose their importance as advisers on principal and individual life decisions. To an increasing degree, modern people seek advice from peer groups, friends, self-help groups, or individual interest groups.

*Still further, the alteration of leisure time, behaviour and consumerism.* This means that, modern people no longer search for an identity in their jobs and in their families but instead in leisure time and in media entertainment and in being together with the 'right' kind of friends.

*Finally the dissolution of firm ideological commitments.* What I am

trying to say is that religion, as well as the nineteenth century's great philosophies such as liberalism, nationalism and socialism are losing their significance. Modern people tend to ignore permanent value commitments.

#### *Four types of contemporary bourgeois culture*

The changing social structure implies the decline of the bourgeoisie as a social unit. The bourgeoisie as a unified social class no longer exists. It is becoming divided into different and more or less distinct bourgeois milieus. Consequently, we have to ask: have the former bourgeois values and virtues been eliminated or do they continue to exist, though in a new and modified way?

I don't believe that the bourgeois culture has been dissolved totally. What has actually happened is that the bourgeois culture has undergone a process of diversification--like the bourgeoisie as a social class did before. Today we can identify at least four different cultures in German society with different value orientations and mind sets (Gebhardt 1998).

The first one can be called 'The Traditional Bourgeois Culture'. The traditional bourgeois culture is represented by the so-called Upper Conservative Milieu (See Figure 4). A typical member of this milieu is older than 60 years, has a high level of education, a high income and enjoys a high standard of living. Typical life goals are a successful occupational career, wealth and a distinguished way of living based on the classic humanistic ideals of education. Lifestyle is dominated by high demands for quality, respectability and an excellent knowledge of what is 'worthwhile'. His conception of ideal life is to be a highly sophisticated personality. We might call him a 'cultivated connoisseur'.

The second one can be called 'The New Bourgeois Culture'. The new bourgeois culture is represented by the so-called Technocratic-Liberal Milieu (See Figure 4). A typical member of this milieu is between 30 and 60 years of age, has a high educational level, a high income and enjoys a high standard of living. Typical life goals are a successful occupational career and material achievements. Career as well as private life are thoroughly planned. A successful career and wealth are, however, no end in themselves, but a prerequisite for being able to enjoy life. His lifestyle is shaped by the desire to go with what is fashionable and to enjoy life at a high level of quality. He wants to be what we call a 'Bonvivant'.

The third one can be called 'The Alternative Bourgeois Culture'

The alternative bourgeois culture is represented by the so-called Alternative Milieu (See Figure 4) A typical member of this milieu is also between 30 and 60 years of age, has a high level of education a middle-class income as well as a middle-class standard of living Self realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*) is the typical life goal together with the strong desire for a meaningful life. A certain degree of success in his occupational career and a guaranteed standard of living are necessary preconditions for its achievement Lifestyle is shaped by a moderately unconventional behaviour, a great interest in cultural and political questions and a strong sense of responsibility towards social and environmental issues His concept of an ideal life is preserving his sense of commitment and deriving satisfaction from life

The fourth and last one can be called 'The Young Bourgeois Culture' The young bourgeois culture is mainly represented by the children of the Technocratic-Liberal Milieu and the Alternative Milieu (See figure 4) The typical member of this milieu is younger than 30 years and aims at a high educational level, a middle-class income and a middle class standard of living The typical life goal is still the yearning for personal freedom and independence, for adventure and fun. Career and wealth are regarded as necessary preconditions for its achievement Lifestyle may be described as casual and anti-conventional. What counts is self-realization, fashion and consumerism. Everything that promises to be fun, is welcome As a matter of fact, his conception of an ideal life is 'let's have a party'

## CONCLUSION

Bourgeoisie as a social class with its distinctive elements such as a high level of education, income well exceeding average, and middle class occupations, exists today. It is, however, becoming differentiated into different social milieus. And, considering the exact definition, bourgeois culture has also not ceased to exist. All the mentioned types of bourgeois cultures have some characteristics in common, a more or less well-developed sense of élitism, the aspiration for career and wealth, and the strong desire for distinction, which means a strong will to distinguish from and contrast with other social groups. But what's going on today is that these formal values are interpreted in a different way and, in addition, are given a different content. Nevertheless, all the four bourgeois cultures have another common feature greater importance is attached to the meaning of such values like 'personal freedom' and self-realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*) and the

orientation is—on a larger scale—dominated by the strong desire to pursue pleasure.

In conclusion, I must emphasize that the bourgeois culture in Germany has not ceased to exist today even though we are confronted with very different appearances of it. Therefore, it seems more appropriate not to talk about the decline of the bourgeois culture but instead about its transformation.

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Part Three

Values and  
Orientations

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## Middle-class Formation and the Cultural Construction of Gender in Urban India

• Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of a sizeable Indian middle class in the last decades<sup>1</sup> is widely regarded—with hope by the ‘modernizers’ and fear by the ‘traditionalists’—as the single most important development in the ongoing transformation of Indian society. Within this largely urban, college educated group, it is the *woman* whose attitudes, behaviour, values and role perceptions have excited considerable interest. The middle class woman is truly pan-Indian in her characteristic features. Whether she lives in cities like Agra, Varanasi, Patna and Hyderabad, or in the larger metropolises of Delhi, or Mumbai and Bangalore, her aspirations and fears are the same. What is significant for her identity formation is her *social class*, rather than any peculiarities of her local or linguistic culture. Initially, this brings up the question of how class and gender are related. To what extent did the ideologies of Indian womanhood and femininity influence the formation of a middle class? And to what extent is this identity-formation based on religious grounds? What does gender mean in these contexts? Having these questions in mind, I will focus on the cultural construction of Indian femininity and the dynamics of religious ideology in the urban middle class.

<sup>1</sup>It was observed in the conference that according to a survey by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) the middle class grew from 8 per cent of the population in 1986 to 18 per cent in 2000, which is about 185 million.

I will argue that an important theme in the process of shaping the Indian nation and its middle class has been the ideology of female *shakti* (power) and female chastity—cultural themes that have been taken up in the agenda of Hindu fundamentalist formations, such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Since the ideology of the pure and 'perfect wife', as well as the 'powerful mother' was one of the major elements in the bid of the Indian middle class to disassociate itself from other classes and social groups, I will look at how 'ideal womanhood' is being presently 'renegotiated' by the younger generation.

To clarify the link between female identity and social class requires a closer look at the ideology of the 'perfect wife'—the *pativrata*—and the changes it is undergoing in the urban environment at present.

### THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY DURING THE REFORM AND INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS

The term *pativrata* is a strongly ideological and religiously charged concept, which is used as a term for an 'ideal wife' who has taken a vow (*vrat*) for her husband (*patri*). She should have qualities like obedience, patience and gentleness, and should serve her husband like a god. Her devotion contains submission, unlimited loyalty and sexual chastity. It is especially the idea of female chastity, which in connection with Victorian prudery became a dominant cultural paradigm in the nineteenth century, one that hasn't lost its importance till today.

As I will show later, this paradigm is closely related to the formation of the Indian middle class itself. It is well known that *Sita*,<sup>2</sup> the heroine of the *Ramayana*,<sup>3</sup> has been the most cited example of an ideal *pativrata* and a role model for Hindu women. Traces of this normative model are still engraved in the imagination and self-perception of Hindu women today. Even though the idealization of women as submissive sacrificing *pativratas* has been repeatedly emphasized in religious Sanskrit-texts, these texts are not a reliable witness to the social reality either in the past or today. The texts, which were usually composed by high-caste men, reflect the interests and practices of a minor but

<sup>2</sup>Wife of Rama, heroine of the *Ramayana*, also ideal of Hindu wifehood

<sup>3</sup>Epic narrating the heroic deeds of king Rama, composed between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. There exist a variety of *Ramayanas*, but the texts of Valmiki and Tulsidas are the most widespread.

powerful elite Yet, repetitious themes and conflicts do give valuable information about cultural paradigms, particularly because ideas values and role models are often substantially influenced by the powerful groups of a society (in the case of India by its highest castes) Therefore, although one should refrain from evaluating Sita as a mirror of high-caste female behaviour, the *paturata*-ideal did influence the orientation and social status of middle class women by deeply moulding their perception and thoughts—and with it their gender identity.<sup>4</sup> The Indian middle class was emerging by the end of the nineteenth century due to massive social and political changes and the establishment of a gigantic bureaucratic administration and legal system by the British Since the entry into this professional class was through education in the English medium, the emerging middle class was predominantly *high caste* Accordingly, high-caste values, like purity and sexual chastity, together with the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century values—such as national pride, education and Victorian prudery—led to a new ideal of Hindu womanhood In the process of establishing high-caste (middle class) values and re negotiating Hindu identity, women were to become symbols of stability and tradition as well as icons of purity.

I will show how this new ideal of womanhood was promoted during the Hindu reform movement and the rising independence movement by using the examples of the goddess *Bharat Mata*<sup>5</sup> and Rabindranath Tagore's novel *The Home and the World* (Tagore 1961 (1919)).

The goddess *Bharat Mata* was invented in 1882 by the famous Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterji in his influential book *Anandamath* (Monastery of Bliss) (Chatterji 1992).<sup>6</sup> With this novel Chatterji inspired a new wave of patriotic writings and influenced a multitude of authors and intellectuals, as well as religious reformers such as Aurobindo Ghose<sup>7</sup> and Vivekananda Through their words

<sup>4</sup>This is also true for women of lower castes (and classes) As it has frequently been pointed out, lower castes tend to accept the ideological principles of the higher castes Giving up certain customs of their own caste, thus, is mandatory if they are seeking upward mobility and with it the status of the higher castes

<sup>5</sup>*Bharat Mata*, meaning 'Mother India', Goddess in the shape of the territory of India.

<sup>6</sup>The novel is a dramatic, patriotic call for defending 'Mother India' against the British colonial power The children of *Bharat* (India) assemble around the *Guru Mahatma Satya* in Bengal to free the country through resistance and sabotage See B C Chatterji, *Anandamath*, New Delhi, 1992 (1882)

<sup>7</sup>Better known as Sri Aurobindo from Pondicherry

and deeds they helped spread the popularity of the new goddess in the educated sections of society. Embedded in the *Zeitgeist* of the twentieth century, the goddess Bharat Mata became a symbolic figure for a whole nation. It was a commonly held belief that 'true patriotism' can only be created through the portrait of a powerful goddess. This was based on the conviction that the rising nationalism had a potential of endless *shakti* (Anderson/Damle 1987, p. 24).<sup>8</sup> *Shakti* (power), however, is closely associated with female sexuality and the need to control it. The witty remark by Wendy Doniger, that women and demons are dangerous, but demonic women the most dangerous (Doniger 1985, pg. 97), refers to this potentially destructive power that women and goddesses are ascribed in the Hindu worldview. *Shakti* in connection with sexual desire and women's inability to control it is repeatedly mentioned in a variety of Hindu stories. To give an example, in a well known myth the goddess Kali danced wildly after having killed a gigantic demon. The gods started to worry because Kali's ecstatic dance—her sexual energy—threatened the order of the universe. Therefore, her husband Siva threw himself underneath her feet. Only when she realized that she was stepping on her husband did Kali stop dancing and the order was re-established. The myth refers to the ambivalent attitude towards the powerful but potentially destructive sexuality of women. It reflects the idea that female *shakti* will only be dangerous and destructive, when it is separated from the male. In this respect, to preserve order, women may and should direct their sexuality only towards one man, their husband. Marriage is thus a prerequisite for the control of women's sexuality. The necessity of controlling women further led to the cultural conviction that they should never be independent. As we shall see later, this understanding has had far-reaching consequences for the lives of middle-class women. To subordinate herself first to her father, later to her husband and then to her sons was meant to assure women's status by protecting them from breaking values like loyalty towards the males of a family and chastity towards their husbands.

The ambivalence towards women, connected to the concept of *shakti* is also illustrated in Tagore's novel *The Home and the World*. Dealing with the fight for freedom in Bengal, Tagore creates, with his moderate hero Nikhil and the radical rebel Sandip, two poles between

<sup>8</sup>Aurobindo understood the Indian nation as 'a shakti, composed of shaktis of all the million units that make up the nation' See W. K. Andersen/S. D. Damle *The Brotherhood in Saffron* New Delhi 1987 p. 24

which Nikhil's wife Bimala—goddess of freedom and symbol of the oppressed country—gets torn apart. In the novel, which is exemplary for the nineteenth-twentieth century Bengali cliché of womanhood, Bimala poses a danger for the freedom fighter Sandip, who has difficulty in resisting her sexual attraction. By equating 'mother' and 'nation', venerable women—like the protagonist Bimala—become symbols of Bharat Mata (Mother India). To mobilize and unite the citizens of Bharat (India), to 're-conquer' the nation and restore the purity and dignity of the mother/nation (Bharat Mata), the image of a dishonoured woman proved to be a powerful symbol in evoking feelings of revenge by its humiliated children. In other words, the fight for freedom from colonial power takes place symbolically on the bodies of women. Says Sandip to Bimala:

Do you not know that I came to worship? Have I not told you that in you I visualize the *shakti* of our country? The geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is (Tagore 1961, pp. 90-1)

Tagore suggests that it requires integrative religious symbols—like the powerful mother goddess—to stir up nationalistic feelings. But with the riots that take place at the end of his novel, he critically concludes that fiery emotions (like uncontrolled *shakti*) will lead to violence and destruction.

By equating 'nation' and 'woman' during the independence movement, the Hindu ideal of womanhood got reformulated, proclaiming that women's sexual chastity is a *necessity* to restore order, moral strength and spiritual power. By giving importance to the idealized notions of the 'powerful mother' but 'chaste wife', the moral power of women was assessed as being *higher* than the authority of men—a concept that Mahatma Gandhi advocated as well, when he saw in women that 'strength made perfect in weakness' (Lannoy 1999).

The deeply ambivalent attitude towards *shakti* and women's sexuality climaxed in its combination with Victorian prudery. As a dominant value, chastity now became a means of identification for women of the rising middle class—also it differentiated them from other castes and classes. Looking at recent political developments and taking into consideration that wide sections of the urban middle class approve of national and patriotic ideals, it cannot be denied that there is a link to the deeply internalized idealization of the pure and sacrificing Hindu woman, whose dignity and chastity has to be protected. Let me illustrate this by coming back to the image of Bharat Mata

In posters, prints and paintings from the period of the independence movement, Bharat Mata is often represented as a victim—for example as a suffering mother with sinister looking children<sup>9</sup> or as a beautiful woman tied up in heavy chains, who cannot save herself<sup>10</sup>. In militant pictures, however, where she is equipped with the weapons of the gods, her closeness to the goddesses Durga and Kali becomes more evident. Despite being an embodiment of *shakti*, Bharat Mata is primarily a portrayal of a humiliated, suffering *pativrata* who has to be avenged. Inevitably, her image evoked resistance to the British hegemony and during the independence movement she became a unifying symbol of national empowerment. As a symbol of unity fundamentalist groups today have tried to revive her image. Being the 'first mother' of all Hindus and an icon of purity, she now offers herself as a vehicle for Hindu national identity in the communal conflict with Muslims. The VHP<sup>11</sup> ascetic Rithambara, for example, in her public, anti-Muslim speeches has created an image of Bharat Mata without arms. Her missing limbs symbolize the hostile countries Pakistan and Bangladesh, which got detached from independent India in 1947 (Kakar 1996). With polemics against the Muslims and using the fantasy of a mutilated mother, Rithambara contributed significantly in mobilizing thousands of Hindus to demolish the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992.

By equating the female body with the nation, deeper levels of the Hindu mind were touched and allowed male assertion to manifest itself in violence under the pretext of protecting the weak and helpless woman/nation. But the question arises, how the cultural image of the chaste *pativrata*, who always seems to be in need of male protection, is being currently re-negotiated. Before looking at feminine values of the urban middle class today, let me give one more example why the ambivalent ideal of the helpless wife and powerful mother established itself during the course of the independence movement without being questioned, even though women started to move from the private to the public sphere and occupied revolutionary new spaces and roles for themselves.

<sup>9</sup> Painting of Amrita Sher-Gil, shown in the catalogue of G. Sinha (ed.), *Woman/Goddess*, Delhi, 1999, p. 119

<sup>10</sup> See a photography of a painting in the photo archive of the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, called 'dukhin Bharat ke shahid' (The martyr of a suffering India)

Already in the nineteenth century, influential social reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy<sup>12</sup> and Dayananda Sarasvati<sup>13</sup> were demanding a wide range of reforms in the Indian social system that dealt with women's issues such as education, *sati*<sup>14</sup> or the right to remarry. No matter how authentic and honourable their commitment was to the improvement in the situation of women, the main force that drove them to fight for social reforms was to *strengthen the nation*—an ideal that is very much part of the agenda of nationalist and fundamentalist movements today and is supported by the urban middle class. To lift women's status and to give legal rights to them was regarded as indispensable to modernize India and to free it from British rule. Even though women registered remarkable gains from these reforms, the idea was not to change their role in society. Rather, legal rights and education were considered important because they allowed women to become respectable wives and mothers who could serve the nation by raising proud and powerful sons. In other words, a new vision of the ideal woman was required to build a strong Indian nation, and with it the emergence of a powerful middle class. Says Gopal K. Gokhale in one of his speeches (1897)

A wide diffusion of female education in all its branches is a factor of the highest value to the well-being of every nation [ . . . ] every single act of our daily life is regarded as regulated by some religious notion or another [ . . . ] And naturally these ideas have a far stronger hold on the minds of women than of men [ . . . ]. Combination of enforced ignorance and overdone religion not only makes them willing victims of customs unjust and hurtful in the highest degree but also makes them the most effective opponents of all attempts at change or innovation. [ . . . ] It is obvious that under the circumstances a wide diffusion of education with all its solvent influences among the women of India, [ . . . ] will not only restore our women to the honored position which they had one time occupied in India, but will also facilitate more than anything else our assimilation of those elements of Western civilization without which all thought of Indian regeneration are made idle dreams and all attempts at it are foredoomed to failure (Bald 1983, p. 33)

Another social reformer's statement about the Hindu woman that 'she must be refined, reorganized, recast, regenerated' clearly shows that in a time of radical social and political transition, a conscious

effort was made to re-formulate 'ideal womanhood' in connection with nationhood

Similarly, during the independence movement, when more and more women stepped out into the public domain and demanded their rights, the 'woman's question' was not addressed by demanding structural changes in gender relations. In other words, the equality of the sexes was never a major issue for large parts of the Indian women's movement. Sarala Devi,<sup>15</sup> for instance, who belonged to the radical movement around Lokamanya B. G. Tilak,<sup>16</sup> and who stood out in her determination, courage and versatility,<sup>17</sup> once said that she would like to flee the prison and cage of the home, to demand an independent life, like the men—but strikingly, the 'women's question' was never a subject for her (Chakravarti 1989, pp. 62–5). It is significant, as Uma Chakravarti has noted, that Sarala Devi's autobiography ends with her marriage (Chakravarti 1989, p. 65). The example of Sarala Devi sheds light on the changes that marriage brings about for the lives of Hindu women.

At this point, I will change my focus to the values connected with marriage and femininity in young middle class women today, because the necessity of marriage is of great importance to the understanding of middle-class female identity in urban India.

### FEMININE VALUES AND THE NECESSITY OF MARRIAGE FOR MODERN WOMEN

The rise of the middle class in the twenty-first century is inseparable from the far-reaching economic changes and growing affluence of the last decades. Within this development, the middle class is at present undergoing rapid changes as a social unit. Though, still mainly high-

<sup>15</sup>Sarala Devi (1872–1945), a niece of Tagore, was known as one of the most prominent militant activists of the independence movement with a strong patriotism. About her life, see also M. Karlekar, *Voices from Within*, Delhi, 1991.

<sup>16</sup>Tilak (1856–1920) was called 'Father of the Indian Unrest'. He was a radical and militant freedom fighter, who organized a militant group of activists against British hegemony.

<sup>17</sup>She started, for example, a militant association for women, the 'Suhrid Samiti', as early as 1905 after realizing that religion was one of the best means to politically organize women. Therefore, she combined religious ceremonies and military training—an approach that fundamentalist groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have taken up and actively implemented in their summer training camps for young girls.

caste, its boundaries are weakening. With greater social mobility and the impact of modernity, lower castes are moving up. They now have more options for professional qualification, since education, not caste (*jati*) has become more decisive for status and income level. This has a profound impact on family structures and gender relations of the urban middle class. Characteristic indicators of social change that especially affect women are better education, a higher age at marriage and a growing number of women in professional jobs. Increasing economic independence and the dissolving of the traditional joint family into nuclear family units reduces the influence of elder family members, especially the 'dreaded mother-in-law', and, among other things, increases the chances for a growing intimacy between the marriage partners. Despite a variety of profound changes, the identity formation of young, middle-class women continues to be largely based on traditional role assignments. This seems to be closely connected to the 'social necessity' of marriage. The college-going generation is well prepared for the fact that the freedom it enjoys in the present life stage as students will come to an end with marriage. Even in the happiest case, where the relationship with the husband promises intimacy and the feared mother-in-law no longer dominates the young bride's life but cooperates with her, the young woman associates marriage with maturity, responsibility and duty, as opposed to fun and freedom during the college-going years. In this respect, the twin themes that presently shape middle class women's identities throughout their life cycles are tradition and modernity. Although better education and potential economic independence allow middle class women to take up a more independent position after marrying into a new family, the young women are very aware that the step into marriage, which is appropriate to their status, still depends mainly on their family background, caste and their physical appearance. Parental admonitions to talk quietly, never to use vulgar words, to move in a feminine manner and to show bodily modesty are very much part of their upbringing. The message is clear and matches with the social reality of a young middle class woman today. A young woman is allowed to break out of role assignments before marriage, but as a potential wife she will be of interest to a man only if she displays herself as a feminine but modern 'super-woman'. Young middle class women are thus well aware that if they do not want to endanger their chances in the marriage market, their social integration demands that they adapt to certain norms. It is common sense in

the Indian middle class that a modern woman, who wants to achieve social respect and success, has to understand how to diplomatically balance individual desires and conventional expectations. In the process of their socialization, girls are constantly told that they should not be different.

Since the taking up of a professional job should in no way alter her traditional role, it is more her gender identity which defines her role perception rather than her occupational status. As Pierre Bourdieu, using the terminology *class habitus*, argues, we make our class position visible by opposing other social categories or classes (Bourdieu, 1980). The belonging to a class not only produces specific lifestyles, but also structures and organizes the way individuals comprehend their identity and social world. Hence, these deeply internalized patterns of behaviour, as well as high-caste values of femininity, will hardly lead to modifications of sex-specific role behaviour. Rather, perceiving themselves as 'modern traditional women', middle class women try their best to fulfill social expectations and conventions based on gender identity. Moreover, in India's middle class, domestic work and the raising of children are rarely ranked inferior to the duties of the men as providers. '[D]omestic duties of women are so essential [a] part of family life that few men tend to rank them as inferior to their own duties as providers. Indeed, the role of mother-wife is highly valued and respected by both men and society in general' (Ramu 1988, p. 217).

Thus, women identify themselves strongly with their role assignments of good wives and caring mothers, irrespective of whether they are housewives or career women. Higher education, the establishment of women in the professional world and their rising economic status have not significantly changed their perception of marriage and specific gender roles that shape their identity as a Hindu and as a woman. In other words, no matter to what extent and with how much self-confidence middle class women presently move in the public domain, they perceive their fulfillment in the private sphere, while conceding the public sphere to the men.

The high value placed on female role assignments and women's willingness to forego their own interests for the benefit of the family goes hand in hand with the social disapproval of female self-assertion. The expectation that a woman, as a symbol of culture and tradition, should always have a stabilizing effect on family interests, contradicts the increasing desire of young women for more personal space and independence. However, their readiness to fulfil clearly defined

female role assignments after marriage does not prevent young women from expecting a more self-determined life than that of their mothers. Globalization processes, the new media and an open economy strongly influence the life and self-confidence of the younger generation. This leads to the consequence that culturally transmitted values, such as Sita, the prototype of an ideal *pativrata* and role model for women, is undergoing interesting reinterpretations. How recent developments in urban India affect the ideal of Hindu womanhood will be discussed in the following and closing section of this paper.

### THE MODERN SITA

Madhu Kishwar, publisher of the well known women's magazine *Manushi*, has observed that many articles and almost all poems that her magazine receives from women, deal with *Sita* (Kishwar 1997, pp. 20–1). If one asks women, which example of an ideal wife spontaneously comes to their mind, the answer one will most probably get is 'Sita'. This was also true of my own empirical fieldwork<sup>18</sup> among middle class women of three generations in Delhi conducted between 1998–2000. It was repeatedly stated that mythological *pativratas* such as Sita and Savitri have an undiminished popularity and that they serve as female role models. But the conclusion that the Sita–Savitri ideal still has validity as a powerful role model for urban middle class women is no longer correct and has to be more carefully examined. For example, talking to and observing young, urban middle class women today, often leaves the impression that they adapt to the legendary Sita-image only with their outward appearance. As it turns out, most of them clearly regard the *pativrata* ideal of the submissive and sacrificing wife as an outdated role model. Thus, it is not of importance—as Meagan Morris puts it—'how people are in a passively inherited culture ('tradition') but what they do with the cultural commodities that they encounter and use in everyday life ('practice') and thus what they make as a 'culture' (Morris 1992).

The concern with Sita in articles, poems or plays may demonstrate her function as a role model, but also indicates that she is being increasingly questioned and that the younger generation of middle class women is looking for new role models. This does not mean that Sita as a figure of 'cultural integration' is disappearing, but only

<sup>18</sup> Fieldwork 1998–2000. See also, K. Poggendorf-Kakai, *Gottin, Gattin, Mutter* *Hindusische Frauen der städtischen Mittelschicht im sozio-religiösen Kontext* forthcoming.

that the elements of her identity are being re-negotiated. Let me have a closer look at how the Sita-ideal is shaping the lives of the young generation of middle class women, who are likely to identify themselves through MTV and V-channel,<sup>19</sup> rather than religious role models. Says a 19-year old student:

'Sita has a sacrificing nature and I do not believe that anyone can be like that. Such a person would automatically spoil her life. If one would give an example of our times, Sita would be one of these many uneducated girls who do not know their rights and do whatever the husband says'<sup>20</sup>

Qualities like limitless tolerance and submission, which are associated with *pativratas* such as Sita are no longer perceived as female strengths for which one should strive. This is different from the generation of their mothers. I quote from one interview of a girl's mother:

We try to be like Sita. She is *pativrata*. A *pativrata* is one who seriously serves her husband. She should never quarrel with him or ignore him. She should not go out with another man and never challenge her husband. She must do what he wants. She must have confidence in him and has to look after her house well'<sup>21</sup>

Says another girl's mother

'Sita will always be an ideal, but young women today have much less tolerance. My daughter would not look upon Sita as a role model, she looks for examples in her family—her *bua* [father's sister] and her *mausi* [mother's sister] are models for her'<sup>22</sup>

The ideology of 'perfect wifehood', which is so determining for the elder generation becomes less compelling in the lives of young middle class women. The gap between religious role models and new lifestyles as well as changing requirements of managing day-to-day life, are more and more irreconcilable. Says one student.

'People talk of being like a *pativrata*, but it is not valid any longer. Most of my friends do not believe in such stuff. I mean, if a marriage should work, no question, both the partners have to do their part. Women are no longer as sacrificing as they have been earlier. The man has to try as hard'<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Two popular music-TV channels, aiming at the interests and taste of the young generation

<sup>20</sup>Student, 19 years, Delhi, interviewed on 27 January 1999

<sup>21</sup>Housewife, 44 years, Delhi, interviewed on 6 January 2000

<sup>22</sup>Working woman 48 years Delhi interviewed on 13 October 1999

Student, 18 years, Delhi interviewed on 20 November 1999

Culturally transmitted images and stories are part of the collective memory of a society and organize their experiences. Thus, values of a social group or class become *meaningful* by constructing coherent images and role models. But the more these constructions deviate from social reality, the less they serve as a reassurance of one's identity. The young generation of India's urban middle class finds itself in a situation in which old myths and models are being restructured in order to adapt them to a modern lifestyle. In this process, changes in middle class India seem to best gain acceptance when they occur in a context that is related to religious traditions and norms. Even though religiosity—going on a pilgrimage, keeping religious vows (*vrats*) doing *pujas* or celebrating religious community festivals—continues to play an important role in the identity of the urban middle class traditional norms as a *socially produced system of meaning* are losing their earlier dominance. It seems to be of importance that a powerful consumption oriented lifestyle as well as lasting effects of social and economic changes are merging with a traditional outlook which still holds religious and traditional family values in high regard, but at the same time transforms them by *stretching* these values. Thus, it is not the infringement or open violation of traditional norms, but a merging of tradition and modernity that propels social change in middle class India.

In this process of change, though, the middle aged and elderly women feel especially torn between modernity and tradition, since they regard themselves as being the upholders of moral values and the stability of the family. The disintegration of the traditional joint family system makes them the losers in the modernization process. Having suffered when younger, conforming to the demands of a patriarchal family-hierarchy with the prospect of enjoying greater independence and power with growing age, they now feel cheated of the fruits of their suffering. They can neither expect unquestioned respect by their sons and daughters-in-law, nor are they assured of economic security. Having inherited the ideal of 'perfect wifehood' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they criticize the boldness of the young generation and largely subscribe to the notion that the modesty of a woman will gain her *shakti*, love, respect and devotion and that only then will she become the embodiment of a goddess. They agree with Svami Sivananda when he says:

Modesty is an ornament of women. To go beyond the boundaries of modesty to behave like a man, destroys the elegance, grandeur, grace and beauty of

the fair sex. Without modesty, beauty is ungraceful. Modesty is a fundamental virtue, which a woman ought to possess. It is a wonderful mixture of humility, politeness, decency-elegance, gentleness and sweetness. A woman without modesty is like a flower without fragrance. Modesty raises a woman to the status of Divinity (Sivananda 1979, p. 7).

As mentioned earlier, it is the ideal of female chastity, which more than anything else characterizes the identity of Indian middle class women. Thus, the idealization of female modesty and chastity is not only shared by conservative religious leaders and Hindu fundamentalists but also by wide sections of the middle class, as it seeks to disassociate itself from the upper and lower classes of its own country and from the liberal values of the West. Although a liberal 'western' or feminist perspective will regard the idealization of modesty and chastity as being a major factor in the control and oppression of women, one should not ignore that there is another angle to the concept of the chaste, ideal wife, sacrificing herself for her husband and family, which many middle class women I interviewed struggled to articulate. In the perception of these urban Hindu women, chastity and modesty of a woman do not put the wife in an insoluble dependency-relationship to her husband. Rather, without her protection and holding together of the family, the husband is regarded as being incapable of mastering his life successfully. It is the chastity of a woman that gives a man strength and invulnerability, whereas he is in danger and weakened if a woman lacks unconditional devotion (Kinsley 1989, p. 106). In other words, the idea that a man can only fulfill his duties properly, if his wife devotes herself in complete loyalty to him, refers to a cultural understanding which allows middle class women to perceive themselves as strong and powerful. As a good *paturata*, the woman has the power (*shakti*) to protect her husband as much as she can weaken and ruin him. Thus, the Hindu nationalist and politician Uma Bharati says

Women are inherently superior as a created species. Men are not such noble beings that women should fight for equality. Instead they should fight to be treated with respect. [...] If women combine the *madhurya* (sweetness) their femininity, with self-pride and political awareness, they can teach the whole world the path of liberation (Young 1994, p. 98).

It is evident from this remark that middle class values and the way Hindu women perceive themselves often collide with the demand of equal rights for the sexes. In this respect, wide sections of the urban middle class are more likely to identify with values represented by

fundamentalist groups than with those of the liberal feminist movement. Especially the idea that a woman should arouse feelings of respect, instead of feelings of desire, is shared alike by both the fundamentalists and the urban middle class. Says one woman

We believe that a woman should be looking decent [shil]. A woman should be cultivated, wear decent clothes and should behave decently [...] Her behaviour should be such that a man develops feelings of respect for her, not sexual feelings. Her speech and movement have to be accordingly appropriate.<sup>24</sup>

With this image of ideal womanhood, the Indian middle class and its fundamentalist allies must perforce disapprove of women being 'erotic objects'. Even more, they must disapprove of women being 'desiring subjects'. Greater independence and sexual demands of women, which are associated with the values of the liberal West are thus held responsible for the destruction of the family, the turning away from husbands and other middle-class values related to family life. *Shakti* and with it the much feared sexual power of women has thus become part of a heated public debate, producing a deep conflict in India's urban middle class and its cultural understanding.

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## Dalit Middle Class Hangs in the Air

• Gopal Guru

In the year 2001, one can possibly talk of the emergence of the middle class in the dalit community. This formation of the middle class within the dalit community can be understood in terms of the Weberian definition that focuses on criteria of education, occupation and income as crucial components of the middle class (Béteille, *The Hindu* 2001). Keeping in view this criterion, it has been argued that the middle class in India emerged in the nineteenth century, and now has grown to 100 million (*ibid.*). But this is a rather descriptive definition and does not adequately unfold the comprehensive character and location of the Indian middle class in general and the dalit middle class in particular. Hence, in order to get a comprehensive picture of the complicated middle class situation one will have to deploy a more nuanced and rigorous criterion. This is necessary not only for bringing out the distinctive character of the Indian middle class from the European one but also for understanding the distinction between the Indian middle class and the dalit middle class. In order to capture the specificity of the dalit middle class in particular, and the Indian middle class in general, it is necessary to raise the following points.

First, why did the emergence of the dalit middle class not coincide with the emergence of the middle class in general in the nineteenth century India? Why was the arrival of the dalit middle class delayed? In what way is the dalit middle class distinct from the general middle class? What is so special about its dalitness? In other words, what are the dynamics that seem to be denying the dalits a general middle

class identity? In fact, what is so attractive about the general middle class identity? Why should it attract the dalits? What are the emancipatory, empowering and enabling promises that this identity holds out to the dalits? Or is it constraining? What are the external and internal challenges that the dalits face in terms of acquiring this universal identity called the middle class? What are the normative grounds that seem to keep the dalit middle class suspended in the air? These are some of the questions that require serious academic attention.

The dalit middle class in the country can be said to have emerged basically due to the availability of opportunity structures that were first offered by the British before independence and later by the Indian State after independence. The Indian state, through various reservation provisions, created opportunity structures for the dalit at the central, state and local levels. Thus, the public sector formed the backbone of the dalit middle class in India. The universalization of education in post-independence India created an useful context for its formation. However, it was not the beginning of the state, but it was prevention by the dalit movement led by Ambedkar to formalize all the provisions (Guru 1985). In this regard, it is important to clarify that the British government offered only educational opportunities that was useful for inspiring the dalits rather than placing them in to the colonial bureaucracy that was dominated by the twice born middle class (TBM) (Omvedt 1978). The dalits could get employment only in the manual sections of the government and not in the higher levels of bureaucracy. Thus, the British colonial state could not actually create the middle class among the dalit. In fact, particularly in Bombay (Zelliot 1968) and Madras (Geetha 1998) the dalits were employed in the manual section in Dockyards, Railways, Municipal Corporations and could not find place among the teachers, doctors and the engineers who naturally formed part of the middle class before independence. Ambedkar was the singular exception.

Thus it was after the independence of India, that the dalit middle class was able to acquire a sizeable social base. However, the formation of the dalit middle class could not be uniform and was concentrated in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras (Zelliot 1968; Omvedt 1978, Geetha 1998). There are a number of factors responsible for this. The educational process among the dalits was not uniform across the country. For example, one talks of the dalit middle class in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and later on in Delhi and all the places of power particularly the central and the state capitals in which one could see

the early emergence of the dalit middle class. As compared to north India, the dalit middle class dominated in west and south India. This is so particularly because of the early educational and political tradition led by the dalit and the non-Brahmin movement in these parts of the country (*ibid*). Second, this early lead could be explained in terms of the liberal atmosphere that offered an opportunity for social and educational reform in these parts of the country. This liberal atmosphere was possible due to the Ryotwari land pattern that was in operation in these parts, particularly in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies during the nineteenth century (Guru 1996). In this system, land was a private property and could be sold and bought by a person of any caste. This made the cultivating caste like the Marathas landless, and their land was bought by the Marwaris and the Gujaratis. This de-peasantization pushed the landless agricultural dalits out of the land and hence they had to migrate and take to education, which resulted in the early process of modernization. As compared to this system, the zamindars in the north used dalits and peasants as agricultural labourers which tied them down to the village economy and delayed the process of modernization. Among the dalits themselves, the response to middle class formation has been uneven. For example, castes like the Matangs and Cahmbaras of Maharashtra and the Madigas of Andhra are likely to be relatively few in the total dalit middle class because of their late arrival to the process of upward mobility (Guru 1985). The Malas of Andhra Pradesh and the Mahars of Maharashtra are likely to be more in number in the dalit middle class because of their early response to the process of mobility (Zelhot 1968). We can make this assumption on the basis of the relative lag of the first group of castes in the recruitment of the services. However, in the total size of the Indian middle class the dalit middle class is quite small. Thus, in terms of the Weberian definition, one can see the emergence of the dalit middle class, which has become quite visible and has been able to take a definite shape during the first three decades after independence.

The idea of middle class is liberating for the dalits for the following reasons:

First, the membership of this class is based on acquired virtues rather than ascribed attributes.

Second, as a part of the first, membership is based on merit, excellence and efficiency, which are the set rules of competition in a liberal society.

Third since the membership of this class is based on universally

defined and accepted rules, it should not create any ill feeling among the people when seeking relative placement in the opportunity structure.

Fourth, in this process of mobility it is the individual who is held responsible for success or failure and efficiency or inefficiency. Thus it is the principle of individualism that becomes the governing principle of social relationships within the middle class.

Fifth, the notion of individual right assumes paramount importance in the middle class discourse. The unit of mobility is the individual and not the group. Thus, the pursuit of success and success alone becomes the guiding principle for the middle class. Other values just do not make any appearance in this universe. Thus, the middle class reflects possessive individualism.

Finally, one gets from the above a modern individual who acquires a secular, coherent and undifferentiated identity. A person comes to be recognized not by her or his caste, religion, ethnicity, or language but by the secular universal attributes embodied in modernity. The middle class all over the globe, therefore, carries a modernist identity, which is secular. To this extent a middle class identity holds out emancipatory promise for the dalits by offering them a historical opportunity to transcend their ascribed identity which is demeaning within the Indian caste system. Now the question that has to be raised is whether the Indian middle class has imbibed this secular criterion? This means, can they accept dalits as equal members of the middle class? In other words, to what extent can the dalits really enjoy their new secular middle class identity? Let us examine this in the following sections.

## INDIVIDUALISM OF THE TWICE BORN MIDDLE CLASS

As mentioned above, individual values should be the governing principle of the middle class universe and therefore this liberal principle should become the yard stick for any assessment of personal achievement or failure of the individual. This mobility has to be judged on the basis of standard rules of competition. For the dalit, the 'twice born' are the interlocutors who need to be addressed all the time. The Indian middle class which still has a privileged character does not seem to have adopted and imbibed the liberal character sufficiently as it has adopted different value premises from which it seems to be operating. This often leads to the violation of the spirit of liberalism in the sense that it does not assess dalit mobility on the principles

enshrined in the spirit of individualism. One could find several instances that confirm this anti-liberal position of the twice born middle class, but let me cite only a few of them here. For individual success and achievement, the individual level is all important, which is understandable. One need not accord success to the entire community. Similarly, for failure as well, it is the individual who should be singled out and held responsible for lapses. Here lies the fallacy of the twice born middle class who hold the entire dalit community responsible for the failure of individuals. One could see this collective condemnation during the anti-reservation riots in Gujarat or anti-Mandal agitation in the late 1980s (Guru 2001). One frequently heard that a dalit would never make a good surgeon or a good engineer. Condemnation, therefore, was based on age-old stereotypes.

The upper caste middle class would never apply the same standards of value judgement for individual failure among their own communities. They would always hold the individual responsible for the individual act and not the entire upper caste community. Such biased reading of the situation, by implication, denies autonomous status to the dalit middle class. There seems to be some cunning behind this kind of biased understanding of success and failure where the dalits are concerned. Second, this caste-based evaluation would also treat the horizontal excellence of the entire upper caste community as given and hence beyond any collective critical judgement or scrutiny. The question that one has to raise is that, why the twice-born middle class members apply double standards and thereby betray the logic of genuine liberalism. In other words, why do they follow spurious liberalism in which they can very comfortably accommodate their caste biases. The upper caste middle class does not feel confident about its claims to modernity and second, it seem to be reeling under the tension of a constant threat from the dalits who are now challenging them in the spaces that they cherish most. This results in disparaging caste-based comments, such as: 'The dalit officers have carried their wretched dalit culture right into the middle class locality' (Guru *ibid*). Thus, in the private sphere, social interaction between the dalit middle class and the 'twice-born' middle class has been full of social tensions which finds articulation at the psychological level. The dalit middle class members are psychologically excluded from the larger middle class imagination. Dalit programmes on television make rare appearances, as on 14 April (Ambedkar's birth anniversary), even then the upper caste middle class show unprecedented intolerance towards dalit officers. The upper caste middle class

however, finds it difficult to practice direct forms of exclusion or discrimination due to the strong presence of dalit organizations which are likely to make the state intervene. In the event of the immediate presence of the state, therefore, the 'twice-born' middle class seeks to deploy another method to keep a safe physical distance from the dalit middle class members. For example, middle class localities have emerged, particularly in the hinterlands of towns are basically dominated by the upper caste middle class who take extraordinary care to see that dalits are not able to buy houses in their locality. This is true of all the major cities of India. I have evidence of Pune where the 'twice-born' middle class character is sufficiently evident from any board that hangs on the walls of the housing colonies. The dalits find themselves shunted out to the outskirts of the cities and prefer housing colonies that have a Mandal character. Some dalits would like to escape this stigma by not moving out from government colonies that are relatively safe for maintaining the fractured dalit middle class identity. The larger fractured public space as Alam (1999, p. 205) would like to put it has bearing on the fractured dalit middle class identity. But in the whole process the dalit middle class gets peripheralized from the upper caste middle class.

Before we close this section it is necessary to problematize the role of the state in enabling the dalit middle class to hold on to its status. Has the state been able to empower this section of society to get the middle class recognition? As mentioned earlier, in the beginning, the state was single-handedly responsible for creating the dalit middle class in the country, however, it has also played a dubious role in denying this very recognition to the dalits in the country. The state in India has a very disturbed relationship with the dalit middle class, as it is also responsible for carrying out the exclusionary agenda that is set by the upper castes. For example, it has not been able to achieve the required integrated identity of the Indian middle class. The state for example, dissolved the dalits into the one department that is the social welfare department, which has dalit character at the Pan-Indian level. In other words, it has been the experience that these departments are predominately staffed by the dalits, even the ministers for these departments have historically, been dalit both at the centre and the state level. Thus whatever cultural capital the dalits had accumulated could not generate dividends of larger assimilation. On the contrary, the cultural capital acquired by the 'twice-born' helped the latter, according to some scholars like Bardhan, to enjoy the ruling class status. The dalit middle class s den ed this royal route to the

ruling class. On the contrary it is condemned to the second or the third layer of the state and are completely out of the space dominated by the ruling class. However, dalit politicians may find some access to the ruling class, but this access is on the terms set by the ruling class which might not accord relative autonomy to the dalit politicians as it might accord to the members of 'twice-born' who are privileged to share the same social universe as the ruling class. It would be really interesting to find out how the dalit politicians are treated by the Indian ruling class in India. What is the cultural relationship between the dalit politicians and the Indian ruling class? Thus, to conclude this section, the dalit middle class faces comprehensive exclusion from the middle class and this exclusion is further reinforced by the Indian state. In view of this exclusion what are the resources available to the dalits to find their cultural expression. How does this class cope both emotionally and culturally? Does it fall back upon community resources or does it create its own social world between the upper castes on the one hand and the subaltern dalit community on the other?

### DALIT MIDDLE CLASS AND ITS ALIENATION

The dalit middle class faces radical exclusion from the general middle class but at the same time it does not want to draw its resources from the community in which it has its roots. It is true of almost every part of the country that the dalit middle class members have sought total emotional, cultural and social departure from the other dalits. There seems to be an ontological difference within the dalit community. We have two different social situations, one is reality rooted in the urban slums and the other one is the village ghettoization of the dalits. In view of this predicament the dalit middle class seems to have produced its own social world in which it is trying to organize its social and cultural life. For example, it has started celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti separately. Since the dalit middle class has nothing to do with the ideology of Ambedkar, there is no serious academic or pedagogic activity on this day. Similar cultural events bring the same class of people together for matrimonial relations. The dalit middle class keeps a safe distance from their caste people who normally reside in the slums of major cities. They have undergone a complete change in the value structures. Their past life has become so disgusting that they do not want to be reminded about it. They seek a departure from this humiliating past. This was evident in Maharashtra when some of the families from the dalit middle class prevented their families

from watching the TV serial called 'Najuaka' that focused on the traumatic experience of a dalit woman. These dalits do not participate in the cultural events that involve the common dalits, such as the Nagpur Deeksha Bhumi or the Chaitya Bhumi at Bombay where Ambedkar was cremated. This class condemns the folklore and literature of the dalits as trash. The dalit middle class regards the dalit community as a big burden. It is a cultural menace. It has adopted a very disdainful attitude towards the dalit people from the rural areas or the slums (Sugawa 1984). Even the rhetoric of love, kinship and duty towards the common dalits do not find any place in the dalit middle class universe.

The dalit middle class shuns the common dalits because it wishes to become the ideal type bureaucrat who would consider bureaucratic rationality and transparency as the supreme goal and therefore non-negotiable. This consideration overrides any other bond or relationship. This modern vocation therefore subverts the distinction between the private and the public in the sense that the ideal type takes over the private and social communitarian as well. The dalit middle class raises a fence around herself or himself and refuses to deal normally or humanely with the world that exists outside his/her office or institutional space. The middle class dalit practically severs all social and emotional ties with the dalit community.

There could be two reasons to explain this egoistic modernist dalit. First, he/she has an ambition to become the ideal bureaucrat, who demands bureaucratically correct behaviour—impartiality, efficiency, sincerity and honesty—to be able to live up to the standard of the larger middle class. Second, the dalit middle class develops this ambition out of compulsion, to follow the ideal type, because he/she or even the entire dalit community is kept on probation by the upper caste middle class and therefore the members of the dalit middle class have to provide a proof of rational behaviour. He is likely to be condemned as favouring his own caste people. A dalit middle class person is kept on tenterhooks and would like to avoid being watched by the upper castes. This ideal type, therefore, destroys social relations, both in terms of time and space. For example, the dalits are not allowed to meet the middle class members of their own community during office hours. Second, these middle class dalits are not available even after office hours at their residence which any way is intimidating with a battalion of guards posted at the gates that the common dalit does not dare to enter the imposing premises. The middle-class dalit does not have an organized notion of time and space and the r

residence is turned into office and hence the common dalits are not entertained even if they have a purely social purpose. The common dalits become a menace for the 'reputation' of the middle class dalits. The middle class dalits, represent a growing impersonalization of the social relationship.

Another area of tension between the dalit middle class and the larger dalit community falls in the realm of rights, in the sense that the language of rights (individual) is the lifeline for any middle class including the dalit. As a corollary to this, the middle class earnestly desires fierce competition and honestly believes in the process of exclusion. To that extent a middle class is terribly elitist in its intention and ambitions. It does not care for the moral component of a social relationship. Let us examine this premise in greater detail by citing a couple of examples from Maharashtra. The dalit middle class has been asserting the primacy of individual rights over collective rights. One leading dalit teachers' organization launched agitation against a dalit who was selected for the post of a principal in one of the local colleges in Pune three years ago. This person was selected on the reserved post. The dalits appealed to this selected person not to join this post as it would result in losing the earlier post where he was already working. Thus, they argued that this would help to retain community resource. The elected person, who was upwardly mobile, said it was his personal choice to join or not to join any particular post. Thus he suggested that the community could not decide on his behalf. Thus, individual rights got precedence over the collective rights of the dalit community. As mentioned earlier, such individual pursuit does not get acceptance from the upper caste members of the middle class, and gets a strong reaction from the larger dalit community which attaches cultural symbols that define dalit identity. For example, in Maharashtra (now it has become an all-India phenomenon) it is a common cultural practice among the dalits to greet other dalits not with Namaskar but with Jaibhim (that is Jai Ambedkar). This is used to establish the cultural identity publicly. Those who are not afraid of this or of the cultural examination set by the upper casts would have no hesitation to use this term publicly without any sense of embarrassment. On the contrary, members of the dalit middle class who feel hesitant to use this term as it might disclose their identity would certainly not like to use it. The common dalits therefore use this term quite publicly, with the intention of wanting to fix the social location of dalit middle class. The dalit middle class cannot reject cultural claims completely. In fact, this shows a dialectical relationship

between the common dalits and the dalit middle class in the sense that the dalit community is not divided in a binary fashion between the dalit middle class and the common dalits. On the contrary, the nature of civil society is based not so much on the social capital called 'trust' (Alam 1999), but on the social cunning as accumulated by the 'twice-born' middle class. For example, the common dalits use the term 'Jaibhim' not simply to embrace the dalit middle class but to derive a kind of designated empowerment from this association. This imagined image of the powerful dalit bureaucrats (IAS, IPS) or the trans-local authority helps the common dalit to fight the local forces that otherwise feel free to exploit them. The 'Mayawati phenomenon' has to be understood in this mode of reasoning.

Similarly, the dalit middle class also requires the social support of the dalit community for its own legitimization. It has to maintain some kind of instrumentalist association with the larger dalit community. This is done through sharing material and cultural resources. Sharing of material resources takes place through distributing cloth and books, and paying tuition fees for the needy dalit students, mostly from the slums. Some of them send some money to the dalits back in the villages. Sharing of cultural resources takes place in the transaction in which the dalit middle class allows the common dalit to use their name as logo on the marriage invitation brought out by the common dalits in Maharashtra. This is aimed at acquiring designated empowerment in the cultural field. However, there is an instrumental relationship rather than a symbiotic relationship between the dalit middle class and the common dalits in different parts of the country.

The cultural capital of the dalit middle class is useful only for creating instrumental or transient bonds between them and the common dalits. But this capital will not be reproduced. The welfare state, which is responsible for the emergence of the dalit middle class in the country, is withdrawing from this social sphere, particularly from the realm of education and reservation. One cannot expect Indian capitalism to promote its social base among the dalits in this country. The mobility of the dalit middle class now would be from the horizontal level of poverty and frustration to the same level of horizontal opportunity that generates only handicap ambitions. For example, now it will be difficult to see the dalit rising as the main channel of its mobility, the public sectors, are going to be wiped out completely in the near future. The dalit all over the country will have to settle for the lower level unclean jobs like scavenging, rag picking etc. In horizontal terms the rag pickers son or daughter becomes a

rag picker. Even a District Magistrate's' children are facing the problem of achieving the same level of mobility as achieved by their parents. Thus in the future, India will experience the growing dalitization of the Indian poverty and the lumpenization of the Indian dalit. Both these are likely to proceed simultaneously. Thus, the dalit middle class will have no significant presence. The relationship between the dalit middle class and the common dalits will not remain transient or instrumentalist. It will become more organic and authentic.

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## Changing Political Orientations of the Middle Classes in India

• Zoya Hasan

Contemporary politics in India provides an interesting case for the study of economic and political transitions in comparative contexts. In contrast to cases such as Eastern Europe and Latin America, which have been characterized by both the economic transition from state planning to liberalized economies and the political transition of democratization, India's transition has been initiated within the political context of a vibrant parliamentary democracy. It has generated a lively debate about political developments in India, particularly the dramatic rise to prominence of political Hinduism and its association with the middle class. To understand this association, we need to first look at the nature and size of the middle class and its dominant concerns and orientations not abstractly but with reference to political Hinduism. The first part of the paper offers a somewhat sketchy picture of the Indian middle class. The second part offers some comments on contemporary political change and the role of the new middle class in these dramatic changes, namely the rise of Hindu nationalism and neo-liberalism. Though discerning a pattern in contemporary political change is fraught with difficulty, future historians will notice a connection between the political sway of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and economic neo-liberalism, which has provided a major benefit to the middle classes. Assessing the implications of these trends is even more difficult. But these trends reflect the assertions of the upper castes and upper and middle classes and have broader implications for the understanding of democracy in the post-colonial world.

## THE MIDDLE CLASSES

The grouping of the middle class is problematic in the Indian context. The middle class in the historical context of modern Europe consisted of a hierarchy detached from inherited wealth and status and based on achievements in business, education and the professions. The middle classes in India, as B.B. Misra (1961) points out, did not emerge, as you would expect, in the aftermath of an industrial revolution that weakened the traditional social order. Compared to Europe, the Indian middle classes appeared late on the scene and were artificially formed under colonial rule, primarily because of the educational policy introduced under British rule for meeting the administrative requirements of the Raj (Frankel 1988). Given these origins, members of the middle class were drawn from the upper castes having a literate tradition. Consequently, members of the civil services and the professions disproportionately filled the ranks of the middle classes.

The middle class has grown steadily in size since independence and most conspicuously in the last one decade. This expansion is associated with the process of economic reforms, initiated in the early 1990s. The middle classes are differentiated in terms of occupation, income and education and they are the product of upward and horizontal mobility. But unlike the middle class elsewhere they are diverse in terms of language, religion and caste (Beteille 2001). The latter form of diversity has a recent origin because until quite recently the middle classes were entirely dominated by the upper castes (Sheth 2000).

Various estimates have been made of the size of the middle class. The most widely accepted are the ones based on surveys carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). Until 1996, the NCAER used the income criteria, according to which it had set up five income tranches: above Rs 96,000 annually, between Rs 700,001 and Rs 96,000, between Rs 45,001 and Rs 70,001; between 22,501 and Rs 45,000, below Rs 22,500. But since there is no way of accurately judging the distribution of income and the number of households that fall into various categories, assessments have been more often than not based on consumption patterns.

In India, then, consumption patterns, not income, generally define the middle class. Trends in consumption patterns have been used to assess the size of the middle class, which is not altogether inappropriate since consumption and the lifestyle associated with it is the most important characteristic of this social class. Based on trends in the consumer market, the NCAER classification of consumers is simply based on the ownership of assets and consumption and not on

household income In the advanced industrial democracies, statistical classification of groups is done with reference to employment, income and tax liabilities On the other hand, in India there is no equivalent way of obtaining statistics about employment patterns and income for the vast mass of people According to Nilakanth Rath, despite the fact that the database on the Indian economy has become enormously rich, information on the distribution of income, and even more so on wealth, is still very inadequate (Rath 1999) Thus very little data is available on the distribution of the population according to the level of total household or individual income This is because tax evasion is widespread and tax recovery is very limited owing to the large amount of hidden income or black money The Finance Minister had disclosed in the Winter Session of the Lok Sabha (2000) that the outstanding dues amounted to Rs 620,000 million of which corporate tax alone had a share of Rs 280,000 million (*The Hindu*, 17 February 2001) Even as large numbers of shopkeepers and traders simply don't fall into the tax net, the rural rich are not taxed, and the very rich are under taxed or the full sources of their incomes are not known

Covering the actual trends during the years 1994–5 and 1995–6, the 1998 NCAER Report on Indian Market Demographics classifies the number of households into the *Very Rich*, the *Consuming Class* and the *Climbers* These three consumer groups of households increased from 77.6 million households in 1994–5 to 87.8 million in 1995–6 (*Financial Express*, 28 November 1998) The most optimistic assessments of the size of the middle class put the tally at 170 to 200 million people out of India's population of 1 billion, including 13 per cent of rural and 42 per cent of urban households Amongst the latter it has been said 'There has been a 90 per cent increase in average family incomes during 1983–8 period (alone)' (Corbridge and Harris) This estimate, which is an overstatement, still means that in India the middle class really means the top 20 to 25 per cent of the population with more than three-fourths of the population below it But that is not all The bulk of these three-fourths are below the poverty line The middle classes include what has been described as the petty bourgeoisie, traders, employees in the corporate sector, the middle ranks of the professions, civil service and government employees In terms of absolute numbers even 170 million is very substantial But compared to the whole population, it is not very big Most developed societies have a much larger middle class, which constitutes the median in these societies As a result, it can act as a significant buffer between the dominant classes and the

ble layer of the lower classes Th s

large social grouping is wooed by the upper classes to stabilize their own position. But in India the lower classes and the poor are much larger and they are more self-assured today, especially since electoral politics is now the central arena of democratization dominated by high levels of participation of the lower orders of society compared to the relative lack of political interest of the upper middle classes and the elite. Given the nature of the middle classes they find themselves bracketed with the elite in terms of its interests especially because in the past decade, the much larger layer beneath them has challenged the privileges of the upper and middle classes. The middle classes dominate the corporate world, the bureaucracy, the media and the professions. Not surprisingly, this class has had a very considerable influence in shaping government policies as well as the values and discourses of a range of institutions from the press to the judiciary. The members of the middle classes overwhelmingly dominate these institutions. It has a disproportionate influence on the policies finally chosen. But what it does not have is control over the electoral-democratic process. Threatened by the economic majority the middle class has often identified with the elite. The middle class sees its self-interest as synonymous with and expressive of the national interest.

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSITION

Against the background of the growth and expansion of the middle class, consider first the shifts in political culture from the early years of the Nehruvian regime in the 1950s. Politics in the sense that Nehru or the members of the Constituent Assembly understood it has been stamped out. The whole enterprise of democracy and development owed a great deal to the debates in the Constituent Assembly dominated by the 'tall and inspiring men' of the radical nationalist elite, as Rajni Kothari describes them. Development and social justice was the *raison d'être* of the state and the basis of its legitimacy. The early decades of economic policy were focused on state intervention, government investment in the development of large-scale industrial units rather than on the production of consumer-oriented commodities. Such policies were connected to the process of a modernizing India in which industrial development was linked to a political culture constituted by discourses on the need for the advancement of the poor. Political speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru to popular films such as '*Mother India*' and '*Do Bigha Zameen*' (Gadgil 1998) shaped linkages between the ideology of development, the decrease of poverty and

the nation-state and representative democracy (Fernandes 2000) Universal suffrage, increase in literacy, growth of market and communications created the objective conditions for the invention and reinvention of an all-encompassing national identity (Ahmed 2000) The legacy of the anti-colonial movement served as the ideological cement of society and development This agenda had the support of the professional middle classes.

But four to five decades later, under conditions of a postcolonial sovereign, developing society, the ideology of anti-colonial nationalism is insufficient, unless replaced by a powerful anti-imperialism The growth of such nationalism has been precluded by the rise of the BJP to national power—the most significant political change from the Nehru period A remarkable feature of political Hinduism represented by the BJP is the ease with which it has filled the political vacuum created by Congress decline. For sure, political Hinduism has taken shape in the political system and through sustained campaigns of the *Sangh Parivar* since the mid-1980s. And yet, it also found more fertile ground and an expanding base of support as a result of changes in the Indian society These include the collapse of the Nehruvian consensus, the intensification of market relations, rapid acceleration of communications and travel facilities, and generally more mobility and exposure to the world outside Some of these changes have been fuelled by the overseas connection A development of considerable significance is the emergence of the non-resident Indians (NRIs), especially the American NRIs They are the richest ethnic minority in the United States. Some of this wealth and clout is being recycled in the Indian economy. Sometimes their 'long-distance nationalism' has prompted them to take strong positions on nuclear weapons, Kashmir and, human rights. They do represent a powerful new force in Indian society and politics.

The transition, which is both political and social, has centred on two trends. On the one hand, there has been a shift in public political discourse away from a focus on poverty-reduction and radical redistribution of material resources as a central objective of state policy On the other, is the development of a growing public culture of consumption and an unabashed celebration of consumerism This shift has been associated with a much more open display of conspicuous consumption than was generally common in Indian society. Both television and print media have contributed to the dissemination of this new culture and to make it the common aspiration of the middle classes The new culture is increasingly presented, at least, by its vota

ies, as the widening of choices and the proliferation of a variety of goods and, therefore, of variety and difference. Consumers can choose between many different cars, washing machines, food and clothing and international brand names. The editor of a print magazine commented:

'Free us to create wealth, not control us in the name of poverty eradication'—appears to be the new mantra. In the 1960s and 1970s, accumulation of wealth was still suffering from a Gandhian hangover. Even though there were a whole lot of families who were wealthy all over India in the North and South if you noticed all their lifestyles were very low key. They were not exhibitionist or they were not into the whole consumer culture. Now I see that changed completely... You want to spend on lifestyle. You want your cellphone. You want your second holiday home, which earlier as I said people would feel that sense of guilt—that in a nation like this a kind of vulgar exhibition of wealth is contradictory to Indian values. I think now consumerism has become an Indian value (Fernandes 2000).

This is not quite the *Tryst With Destiny* that Nehru had spoken of. Also the perception of choice blurs the fact that liberalization and globalization have created pervasive inequalities between classes and income groups. These inequalities encompass gaps in wealth, income, and access to productive employment and a whole range of other enabling material and social opportunities (Ghosh 1999).

In interviews conducted by Leela Fernandes in her study on the middle class, economic reforms and globalization, individuals from various segments of the middle class pointed to the new choice of commodities as the central benefit of liberalization and regime change (Fernandes 2000). Even though these interviews were conducted during the stagnation of an economic recession in 1998, individuals indicated that they no longer had to depend on relatives' abroad to provide them access to various foreign commodities because 'abroad is now in India'. Hence the sense of pride that their aspirations can be realized within India's borders (*Ibid.*) This sentiment has been vividly captured by a recent television advertisement of air conditioners produced by *Air Cooling Systems*. Comfortably spread out on a sofa in the posh surroundings of his air conditioned drawing room a young man proudly announces: 'Arre wah Switzerland is in India. Now I can spend my vacations here'.

Globalization in consequence has justified the pursuit of individual wealth as never before (*Hindu* 27 August 2000). The enormous popularity of Star KBC show (*Kaun Banega Crorepati* Who Wants to

Become a Millionaire) sums up the prime aspirations and values of the new middle classes. An even greater fascination with consumption is blatantly obvious in the rival Sony show, *JCPK (Jeeto Chappar Phad Ke)*, the latest version of Who Wants to Become a Millionaire. Equally significantly, the popularity of films *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* and *Dilwale Dulhaniya le Jayenge* and the great family sagas on television, which exemplify a combination of ostentatious living, high consumerism and traditional family values, combined with a perpetuation of traditional gender roles in the family, amply reveal the social orientation of the middle classes to which these cater. Another related example is the way in which the print media has been flaunting India as a Beauty super power next only to being a Nuclear and Information Technology super power. All this, surely, constitutes a major transition in political culture in India and signals the ways in which the Indian nation has been reimagined in the context of globalization.

### THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS AND THE DEMOCRATIC UPSURGE

In this section I look at the relationship of the middle classes to political Hinduism and the role it played in meeting the democratic challenge from the lower castes and classes. Consider the political preferences of the middle classes. The findings reported in the 1999 Lok Sabha post-election survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies on the social basis of voters' choices—of who voted for whom—show clearly that the privileged sections are more likely to vote for the BJP in preference to other parties, including the Congress. Significantly, this survey indicates that though religious symbolism has been a trademark of the BJP's mobilization strategy, religion is not the principal basis in the creation of the new social bloc, which has brought the BJP to power at the Centre. Rather the social bloc is formed by the convergence of the traditional caste and community differences and class distinctions (Yadav 1999). This can be seen from the fact that the share of the BJP vote goes up as you move up in the social hierarchy from the lower castes to the upper castes whereas that of its allies in the coalition goes up as you move down the social ladder. In class terms the BJP has a pronounced upper and middle class support base. The poorer the voter the lesser are the chances of voting for the BJP (*Ibid.*, p. 38). In short, the new social bloc is built around the master cleavage of caste and class privilege. In this context it is no exaggeration to say that the BJP represents the

rebellion of the elite and middle classes defined by an overlap of social and economic privilege (*Ibid.*, p. 32)

Middle classes were keen supporters of Rajiv Gandhi in the mid 1980s, but by the 1990s many of them switched their allegiance to the BJP. A number of scholars have argued that the BJP has won over their support by default. For example, Christophe Jaffrelot has written that

The BJP attracted support by default because the Congress was deeply unpopular. Moreover, the BJP probably won over former Congress supporters all the more easily because it appeared to be the sole proponent of a political project—the building of a strong India—which had been established and assiduously promoted by Indira Gandhi (Jaffrelot 1996, p. 433)

Does political Hinduism have a persuasive power for the middle class or is its success a purely negative triumph that has come about on account of the terminal decline of the Congress and the failure of left and centrist forces to fill the vacuum?

In looking at this relationship I want to assume that most of the basic facts about the career and composition of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP are quite well known. I will, however, mention two moments—the Mandalization of politics following the acceptance and implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission and the politics of Mandir symbolized in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992. These two moments are related to the emergence and assertion of the middle class in the countryside and cities and to what has been called the democratic upsurge. In the 1990s, elite assertions and subaltern mobilization intersected with the politics of caste, community and region to give shape to the reinvention of India.

These developments, to be sure, have created a constituency among the middle class for political Hinduism. This can be gauged from the attitudes of the middle class to three pivotal events, the Mandal recommendations on job reservations, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the nuclear tests. The Sangh Parivar is known to be widely associated with all the three events. On the Mandal issue, even though less than 50,000 jobs were affected, the depth and scale of middle class hostility is well known. On the demolition of the Babri Masjid the middle class was more divided. Evidence of noteworthy joy notwithstanding, there was considerable disgust at the actual demolition and the defiance of the court, constitution and law by elements of the Sangh Parivar. Indeed some of the young men who participated

in the Ram Janam Bhoomi agitation belonged to the lower middle classes from the upper castes. But this has to be seen in the context of protests over the Mandal Commission and extension of reservations to the Other Backward Classes. The liberal sections of the professional middle classes were unhappy with the vandalism of the event. However, on the bomb, the media and most of the middle class people were rather proud and pleased with the new status acquired by India as a result of the nuclear explosions. The overwhelming support for the decision to go nuclear had nothing do with a change in threat perceptions, but with a search for self-esteem and respect in a world where not enough respect was shown to India.

Hence it is often suggested that the success of political Hinduism expresses the cultural ethos of the vast majority and particularly of the middle classes, which could not be articulated under the hegemony of the secular elite. The political developments of the first quarter century after Independence, however, show that there was no such relationship. If this were so, then, political Hinduism should have come to power in the aftermath of Partition, which was a moment of extreme political anxiety and communalization. Yet a secular state was established. Nevertheless, we need to inquire why is it that the middle classes, who had made substantial gains from the Nehruvian model of social democracy, suddenly acquiesced in the hegemony of political Hinduism. The political ascendancy of Hinduism in the 1980s and the backing it has received from sections of the middle class needs a conjunctural explanation than one located in a cultural mind-set. The middle-class reaction is not born out of an intrinsically conservative cultural disposition, as sections of the middle classes had defended and sustained the progressive agenda of a modern secular democracy. The change in the political conjuncture—the decline of centrist hegemony and change in material circumstances and environment—induced a shift in the political thinking of the middle classes. As Aijaz Ahmad argues:

That in a developing society in which the structures of capitalism are fully in place but where processes of state formation are weakly developed and premised on acute unevenness of region, community and class, an ideological cement of a nationalist kind is an objective necessity and if the Left fails to provide that cement, and if the liberal Centre begins to collapse, an aggressive kind of rightist nationalism will step into that vacuum to resolve that crisis that is produced by the objective processes of state formation and capitalist development—and this right-wing nationalism is bound to take advantage

of precisely that misery of the masses and the petty bourgeois strata which (the) liberal model promised to alleviate and did not (Ahmed 2000, p. 182)

The centrist hegemony of the first few decades was based on the heritage of the national movement and a concrete set of achievements independent model of industrial growth, considerable reduction in large-scale feudal landholdings which benefited the upper peasantry, growth in infrastructure, expansion of educational facilities and technical personnel. This model of economic and political development held out the promise of redistributive justice as well as benefits of rise in income and education for substantial sections of the population, especially the middle classes. As long as this promise remained credible the liberal-reformist sections of the middle classes were able to hold off the challenge of the Left and the Right and command the loyalty of the poor and the marginalized sections of society (Ibid 2000, p. 177–90). They were able to do so precisely because a noteworthy feature of this project was a national definition of the polity with an emphasis on the nation-state's responsibility towards society. This model began crumbling from the late 1960s, though its hegemony was provisionally propped up by the victory in the Bangladesh war. The imposition of the Emergency suggested strongly the disintegration of the model. This called for a far-reaching redefinition of nationalism itself.

The end of the Nehruvian consensus and the collapse of liberal nationalism provided the major opening for a rightwing nationalism, which set out to exploit the failures of the earlier nationalism and to formulate a different national agenda. The proposal to reformulate the national ethos coincided with the erosion of the Congress model of the earlier decades and the failure to reconcile universal citizenship with specific identities. The followers of cultural nationalism took advantage of the crisis produced by these infirmities in the objective processes of state formation and economic development and stepped into the political vacuum produced by the failings of the Congress model. Much as forces of reaction may misuse nationalism, national sovereignty remains an important concept in view of the distinctive requirements of a nation state in a developing capitalist society and the ideological bond it provides in these societies, where state formation and political institutions are weakly developed (Ibid. 2000, p. 182). Moreover these shifts have coincided with broader processes at work particularly the intensification of the democratic process

overlapping networks of regional and national education systems and print media, growth of Information Technology, expansion of television and videos, and the creation of one of the largest markets for consumer goods in the world. The restructuring and dislocation of politics and society affected by these tendencies of integration, on the one hand, and differentiation and fragmentation, on the other, requires an ideology that political Hinduism seems to provide (*Ibid.*)

In addition to the historical shift, the high ideology of anti-colonial nationalism that so largely guided the Constitution is being reshaped by the phenomenon of democracy in India and the wide array of struggles and conflicts between castes, classes and communities. The deepening of democracy cannot be associated with specific events that seem to constitute the defining moments of elite revolt. The expansion of the democratic processes has had the effect of creating an axis of citizenship within the particularities of class, caste, gender and denomination. Yet, the defeat of Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime in the 1977 elections was one such event that brought about a decisive shift in the form and content of democracy. It established the importance of the vote and representative institutions of government to give voice to popular demands of a kind that had not been able to disturb the order and tranquility of the corridors of power ever before.

Today's middle classes feel apprehensive that the processes of democracy and lower caste assertions have put at risk their privileges. Indeed, the process of democratization has struck very deep roots, especially among the disadvantaged and the historically marginal groups who want a share in power. Equally important, democratic values have become ingrained among intellectuals and institutions vital to democracy (Frankel 1988, (Introduction) p. 3). But as Yogendra Yadav suggests the big turnout figures tends to favour the numerically large disadvantaged groups. Survey data show this is because lower castes, dalits and tribals are more likely to vote than upper caste Hindus, and this is also true of the very poor relative to the upper class. The better educated and more advantaged citizens, on the other hand, are least likely to vote since their preferences would be submerged among the votes of the 'great crowd'. For this reason, at this juncture anti-democratic attitudes are not entirely uncommon in the urban middle classes that for years was regarded as the bedrock of democracy in the country. The impatience with political protest, frequent elections, proliferation of parties in a sharply polarized parliamentary system together with the great desire for stability and law and order point towards a disdain for democratic processes and equality for the masses.

and their demands on the political system. Be that as it may The urban middle classes blame the erosion of institutions and the civility of public culture to the induction of plebian leaders and plebian politics, which has given a fillip to a blatant pursuit of power (Kohli 1991). But they readily ignore the fact that the influx of new entrants from the lower orders and the vernacularization of political discourse have not led to an effective popular control of the policy agenda

Though democracy has not accomplished social and economic equality to the extent desired, yet, the achievement of democratic freedoms has created pressure for democratization in many other spheres and the ground for struggles for greater equality After two decades of intensive political competition, caste and communal conflicts have increased in a struggle to control the scarce resources of the state The democratic upsurge concentrated in the northern heartland threatens to finally end the domination of the upper castes and upper classes in the bureaucracy, as well as in parliamentary institutions. In the circumstances, urban middle classes the main beneficiaries of economic reforms, seek protection from the political disorder that threaten opportunities for further gain. They see political Hinduism as the most important apparatus for safeguarding their privileges. In the light of this, Thomas Hansen has argued that 'Hindu nationalism' represents a conservative revolution against the broader democratic transformation of both the political field and the public culture in postcolonial India It promises to discipline the plebian assertiveness (Hansen's phrase) created by the democratic revolution of the past decade. He notes that it was the desire for recognition in the world combined with the simultaneous anxieties of being encroached upon by the Muslims, the plebeians, and the poor, that over the last decade have prompted many Hindus to respond to the call for Hindutva at the polls, and to embrace the promises of order, discipline and collective strength (Hansen 2000)

However, it is important to remember that political Hinduism's success did not grow out of a democratic deficit, rather it is the product of the middle class perception of 'democratic excess' manifested in the intensification of political competition, lower class-caste assertions, and the equally intense battles over religious sites and symbols of culture and the meaning of secularism, history and national security In this state of affairs, political Hinduism has come to the fore as a kind of 'conservative populism' that has mainly attracted not only the more privileged groups who fear an infringement of their dominant positions but also plebian and impoverished groups who have been

seeking recognition around majoritarian rhetoric of cultural pride, order and national strength (Hansen 2000, pp. 8–9). And so the BJP wants to transform India into a sovereign, disciplined, powerful nation, based not on borrowed ideas of secularism and socialism, but on an imagined past evoking the greatness of Hindu India and yet favouring globalization and integration into an open international economy (Kohli 1998, p. 10). It promises to do this not by imitating western values but by being fully Indian. Building on the argument that India's imitation of the West had failed to gain the West's respect, the BJP is seeking to create a new political culture of governmentality dedicated to an overall vision of control, and a foreign policy that will end India's 'isolation' or as former foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, put it, the 'wasted decades' of non-alignment. Both are essential for the esteem of the middle class and are part of the BJP's attempts to position India as a Great Power. The explosion of nuclear devices can be linked to this political imagination, and the hope that the tests will fetch India the recognition and prestige the middle classes have craved for. The promise of a purposeful, security-oriented law and order government in this context, formed a critical part of this design and fit in very well with the middle class concern for authority, order and stability. Among the broad features of the emerging political design are strong centralization of decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office, an open licence to economic pragmatism, lobbying, machinations, a conspicuous shift from the paradigm of development to national security, disinclination to tolerate dissent and disagreement, and ultra-nationalism. The entire vision is driven by a search for an elusive homogeneity—an idea of India far removed from diversity and plurality.

#### THE MIDDLE CLASSES, NEO-LIBERALISM AND POLITICAL HINDUISM

It is in this larger perspective that observers have noted complementarities between political Hinduism and the policy of liberalization and globalization (Ghosh 1999; Hansen 2000). As argued earlier, the rise of political Hinduism as a major force demands a more general explanation, rather than one couched in terms of particular trends and relationships. To start with, it is misleading to refer to it as a tendency of the majority of the population. The rhetoric is majoritarian and nationalist but in actuality it represents the interests of the few typ ca y urban upper and m dd e classes and drawn predominantly

from the upper castes (Ghosh 1999). Right-wing politics anywhere needs the active support of a part of the liberal establishment. The BJP commands less than a quarter of the national vote. Even so, the Hindutva ideology continues to make significant inroads into state structures and society thanks to the support of the liberal establishment and sections of middle classes, which though divided over its divisive, narrow-minded and aggressive nationalism, make deals to protect their interests with little regard for its consequences. These interests include faster economic reforms so as to complete the transition to a market economy, which this government has pursued as a one-point programme. It has done this by demonstrating its friendliness not only towards liberalization and globalization, but also towards a whole range of policies including 'second generation reforms', which will win it support in the United States and among NRIs, multinationals and the Indian middle classes. The party whose anti-consumerism slogan had been 'computer chips not potato chips' has not only not reversed the direction of economic reforms initiated by the previous Congress governments, it has also established an unmistakably new regime evident from the 2001 Budget and the ecstasy and euphoria generated across TV channels, newspapers and corporate boardrooms. No matter what the opposition within the Sangh Parivar to liberalization and globalization, the BJP political establishment has actively involved itself in disinvestments and privatization (*Outlook* 5 March 2001). Accordingly, priority has been given to privatization and financial and trade policy reform which has involved an explosion in the financial sector activities and in incomes of this section. Professional incomes in finance approach levels equivalent to those in the developed countries, even while wages in the rest of the economy stagnate. On the other side, the neglect of social sector investment means that spending on education, health and infrastructure—a *sine qua non* of long-term economic growth and development—continues to fall short of the levels needed to empower the majority to improve their human capital.

The arguments mentioned above apply in a general sense to the resurgence of revivalist sentiments of various sorts. But they have a particular resonance at the present moment defined by the extension of economic neo-liberalism and political Hinduism. Though the impetus for liberalization came from the top levels of the state apparatus under pressure of the balance of payments crisis and the World Bank, the main beneficiaries have been the upper middle and high income groups. For a significant section of the new middle

'who have acquired a new economic status but not corresponding social status, there is an anxiety to bring the two together through greater religious observances and congregations' (Corbridge and Harris 2000, p. 125).<sup>1</sup> For the more established upper and middle classes, among whom too there is evidence of increased religiosity, it provides a sense of security in a world of radical uncertainty clearly manifest in the challenge from rights and entitlement claims of the deprived. Though the rise in religiosity and rituals is a significant development, it does not account for the middle classes' support to political Hinduism (*Ibid.*). The major impetus for the greater acceptability of political Hinduism derives from the nature of liberalization and pattern of growth, which has mediated the relationship between the middle classes and political Hinduism, rather than just religious or cultural pride. The pattern of growth involves spiraling incomes and extravagant lifestyles of a minority even as it leaves the vast majority untouched or worse off. As economist Jayati Ghosh argues: 'the new growth pattern is one, which is based on the market created by (at most) the upper one-third of the population. This not only has distributive and welfare implications but also means that the market remains narrower than its potential' (Ghosh 1998, p. 326). From the middle-class standpoint, political Hinduism is helpful and functional given that it sees no need for a transformation of political and economic power configurations. Consequently, it serves the interests of groups that are already privileged and leaves unaltered the economic conditions of the majority.

Economic globalization has served first and foremost the interests of the elite and upper and middle classes who have been in revolt against the model of state-led economic development, which at one time served their interests very well, but in their perception had run its course, and, therefore, needed to be changed. The unequalizing nature of the process is revealed most dramatically in the wide gaps between the rich and the poor, which have widened even faster in the recent past. Reform agenda has eroded the incomes of salaried persons, pensioners and the elderly. One reason why it has been iniquitous is that employment generation has been insufficient to meet the requirements of a growing population. The accelerated privatization of the public sector and the move to downsize the government would aggravate the employment situation. Despite growth rates of 7 per cent in the 1990s,

<sup>1</sup>Christopher Fuller has observed in Tamil Nadu, the development of an active programme for the training of Brahman temple priests in Sanskrit scriptures Corbridge and Harris, p. 125

the growth of employment was less than 0.67 per cent in rural areas and 1.7 per cent in urban areas. Nonetheless, the 2001 budget has laid the foundation for an exit policy, which trade and industry had been clamouring for by making it easier for industrial firms to retrench or lay off workers in units with less than 1000 employees. In other words the exit policy has opened the labour market for 96 per cent of industrial establishments and 89 per cent of industrial labour (Jha 2001).

Withdrawal of the state also allowed private capital to renegotiate relationships with labour in the informal economy to their advantage. In this sense reforms are very much about redefining the idea of the state and its capacity to work for groups outside the middle classes. While indulging in anti-state rhetoric to deprive the vulnerable and the destitute from getting the benefits of protection they themselves continue to take advantage of state protection (Robinson 2001). Indeed, the state protects the lifestyle and interests of the already privileged, while chastizing the working class, slum dwellers or other marginalized people who dare to rebel (*Ibid.*) Even as public spaces close themselves to those without credit cards, residential localities hem themselves in against the lower orders with boundary walls and watchmen. It is not surprising that such lifestyles on the part of a relatively small minority would have undesirable social and political consequences. The tensions and insecurities brought about by the widening inequalities induced by the pattern of growth encourage people to seek shelter in particularities, revanchism and lumpenism in many an urban centre. The alienation that comes from deprivation can only too easily be directed towards those who are not in competition but simply represent disadvantaged and materially weak sections and can be attacked with relative ease. This may explain why so many people are susceptible to social tendencies that blame the 'other' for the great gap between aspiration and reality.

The point to note is that the policies of liberalization can succeed only if Indian nationalism is redefined in cultural terms so that political energies are not consumed in opposition to imperialism, but against antagonism towards the enemy within: the subordination of minorities, particularly Muslims and this is justified by an imagined past of irreconcilable differences. During the last three years of BJP rule, therefore, the central force of the anti-reform rhetoric has been concentrated in the cultural sphere, particularly in relation to television, films and media. Sushma Swaraj, in her two stints as Information and Broadcasting Minister, has launched a series of attacks on sexualized representations in the media and advertising. Similarly the resistance

has been directed against newly embraced western customs such as Valentine's Day termed as a plot by the multinationals to corrupt young minds, even as the BJP government has encouraged a free run for multinationals, and emerged as the champion of privatization and disinvestments. What this shows, however, is a broader pattern in which the Sangh Parivar has displaced resistance to the new economic policies of liberalization from the realm of concrete economic policy to a confrontation with the cultural politics of globalization. The handling of the Enron affair and BALCO (Bharat Aluminium Company) privatization seem to indicate that the 'economy of politics' intrinsic to the practices of governance in India is not easily controlled or disciplined by the ideology of the RSS (Hansen 2000, p. 222-3). Globalization, therefore, becomes a critical site in which the politics of economic liberalization has been negotiated through the articulation of new cultural conceptions of the nation and visual signs of wealth and culture that represent the new symbols of national progress in relation to the global. Yet, lacking a programmatic promise of redistributive justice, in contrast to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist nationalism, the dynamic of cultural politics tends to acquire an irrational and anti-minority thrust. Thus, the renewed aggression towards those categorized as 'others', that is all those who belong to foreign religions'. In this worldview, the only enemies are those within the nation determined by social and cultural differences. There is no recognition of domestic economic differences and antagonisms, and, consequently, the constraining role on development that can be played by certain classes, such as landed groups or monopoly capital.

But after four years of BJP-style governance the mood in the country is unsettled. Its record in government has generally been unimpressive. The functioning of BJP-led Central and state governments has made it apparent that its high-minded visions of governance remain more a 'mandate of self-righteousness' than the basis of principled policies or politics and administrative reform. The Hindu right and the middle class domination of it is challenged by sections of the lower castes and classes and by a coalition of popular movements, which are opposed to the project of militant Hindutva. The liberalization agenda has come into conflict with the demands of the agricultural classes. It has come into conflict with other supporters of the Hindu Right, whose intentions are in some senses distinctly anti-modernist, and some of their actions—from the demolition of the Babri Masjid to stopping the shooting of *Fir* and numerous other acts of vandalism—have all caused disorder. The extremist constituency is offset by a

moderate tendency within the BJP, which is concerned to win power in a democratic polity. Logically this would oblige the BJP to behave as a national party by going beyond its support among the middle classes and upper castes. But this requires tangible cement that can only come from a politics of equality. Equality is the only possible ground on which social and identity claims can be reconciled with the demands of justice and dignity. Though equality has moved further away from the horizon; secularization and democratization of life since Independence has impinged upon public debates surrounding the secular principle and continues to inform debates on the idea of state and society in India. This is not to say that the state has accomplished its goals. It is rather to suggest that the pressures on the state from ordinary people, such as the demands for livelihood, minimum wages and the right to schooling are forms of protests with reference to the promise of equality and justice imagined by the Constituent Assembly.

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## Politics of India's Middle Classes

• *Suhas Palshikar*

The Rajiv era (1984–88) of Indian politics witnessed the romantic liaison of Indian middle classes with politics. Prior to that the middle classes were not known for having a favourable predisposition to politics or politicians. These classes were generally believed to hold a cynical attitude to politics and an inactive stance in democratic politics swamped by the 'public'. Politics was seen as an arena where the lay public mattered more than the 'informed' middle classes. Politicians were seen as vulnerable to populist pressures and themselves not very knowledgeable or sophisticated. Besides these reasons, the middle classes also saw politics as distracting from their pursuits of careers. Rajiv Gandhi changed—at least momentarily—some of these images of politics and the politicians.

Rajiv Gandhi brought in new faces—many of them were professionals, experts, etc.—into politics. With many English-speaking politicians and technocrats-turned-ministers, the language of development assumed a new meaning. Development now meant technological development. Instead of 'welfare', development now symbolized a gateway to the 'twenty first century'. The middle classes admired this new politics.

Alas, this romantic liaison did not last long. Ordinary 'dirty' politics reasserted itself with the coming of V.P. Singh. He not only brought the likes of Devi Lal and Mulayam Singh Yadav to the centre stage, he also pursued the agenda of 'social justice' for which the middle classes had only contempt. Although the middle classes did derive some satisfaction from the economic policies ushered in by Manmohan

Singh, they did not fully trust the Congress. Thus, the nineties witnessed the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with considerable support from the middle classes. In the BJP, the middle classes could find almost everything they dreamt of: a frankly market-oriented economic policy, a foreign policy striving to befriend the Americans, a suave middle-of-the-road prime minister along with a strong home minister; all coupled with an appropriate dosage of chauvinistic cultural-nationalist assertion.

And yet middle class politics defies a simplistic identification with the politics of Hindutva. The politics of India's middle classes in the contemporary period, thus, deserves close scrutiny for two reasons. First, although the middle classes have been instrumental in bringing the BJP to power, there are aspects, which make middle-class politics very complex. Second, in the class structure of Indian society, middle classes have occupied a position of prominence after the 1980s. Numerically, the strength of these classes has increased considerably. Besides, the changed framework of the Indian economy has given a fillip to the significance and role of middle classes in the arena of public policy-making and public discourse. Therefore, this paper aims at capturing the complexities of middle-class politics in contemporary India. Section I of the paper looks at the electoral preferences of middle classes. Section II tries to summarize the nature of change occurring in politics that can be traced to the rising influence of the middle classes. Finally, in Section III we attempt to analyse the political role of India's middle classes in the context of class theory. In other words, the paper begins with a woefully inadequate empirical basis and ends up with insufficient theoretical explanations!

## I

### ELECTORAL PREFERENCES OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES

Observers suspect that the BJP rose to prominence since 1989 mainly due to the support it received from the middle classes. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1991, the middle classes had more than one reason to vote for the BJP. Most of all, the decision of the National Front (NF) government to implement recommendations of the Mandal Commission pushed angry middle-class voters towards the BJP. The instability and factionalism characteristic of the NF government also contributed to this pro-BJP trend among the middle classes. Around the same time, the BJP had been militantly championing the politics

of Hindutva by leading the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation. These factors established a nexus between the middle classes and the BJP. The relationship became more visible and well documented in the three successive elections from 1996 (Heath 1999; Heath-Yadav, 1999; Yadav, 1999). However, sections of the middle classes still continue to support the Congress. Besides, the BJP, in order to become a party of governance, has adopted positions, which may not exactly be approved by the middle classes. Efforts by the BJP to attract voters from lower strata and minorities may not have gone well with the middle classes. Therefore, we need to look carefully at available data in determining the voting preference of the middle classes. Below we refer to the series of surveys conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) Delhi, as part of the National Election Study (NES), in order to compare the voting preferences of the middle classes from 1996 to 1999.

TABLE 1: VOTING PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES: 1996-99

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	32.1 (31.3)	31.2 (30.1)	28.2 (28.5)
BJP	23.9 (24.2)	24.0 (25.1)	23.8 (19.7)
BJP Allies	5.2 (5.1)	12.9 (11.8)	17.9 (17.1)
Total	20.3	22.5	21.3

Source CSDS Data Unit

(Figures in parentheses refer to total votes polled among the sample)

#### MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE BJP

Apart from the fact that the middle class vote gets split between Congress and BJP, three other points may be observed on the basis of data presented in Table 1. First, the middle-class vote for the Congress seems to be declining over the four year period, while the same for BJP has remained almost constant. Second, both in 1998 and 1999, the combined middle-class vote received by BJP and its allies is more than what the Congress received from the middle class. Third, the comparison of middle-class vote with overall support for the parties concerned shows an interesting pattern. The Congress

share of middle-class votes was slightly higher than the overall support enjoyed by the party in 1996 and 1998. For the first time in 1999, this share goes down compared to the overall support. In 1999, survey data indicate that support for BJP among the middle class was higher than the overall support for the party. This suggests that *there has been a movement of the middle class away from the Congress and towards the BJP*. Suspension of aggressive Hindutva posture by the BJP on the one hand and the emergence of Sonia Gandhi as leader of the Congress on the other seem to have played an important role in this shift. Besides, the pro-BJP trend is coupled with the rise of BJP allies in various states as recipients of middle-class votes.

We might approach this data from yet another angle. How valuable is the support of middle-class voters to various parties? The middle-class voters accounted for 21, 23 and 21 per cent respectively in 1996, 1998 and 1999 among Congress voters. For the BJP, middle class voters accounted for 22, 21.5 and almost 26 per cent in 1996, 1998 and 1999 respectively. Thus, middle-class votes are extremely valuable for the BJP. Perhaps, they are even more valuable for its allies. It has been further shown that the BJP is more dependent upon votes of the upper middle class (UMC) than the Congress. In 1996, 30 per cent respondents from the UMC supported the BJP. In 1998 too, 29 per cent respondents from the UMC supported Congress and 33 per cent supported BJP (Heath-Yadav 1999, p. 2523). Given the fact that the Congress is preferred by at least 30 per cent voters from a very poor background among whom preference for the BJP ranges between 12 and 24 per cent only; the above figures become extremely significant. We can, therefore, safely emphasize two points. (a) BJP and its allies have been emerging as the main preferences of middle classes over a period of time; (b) the BJP—due to the class composition of its voters—depends more on middle-class votes since it has a limited base among the poor. In terms of gross support base, 34 per cent of Congress votes come from the upper strata while 69 per cent of BJP votes come from the upper strata (Yadav 1999, p. 33). In this sense, BJP can be seen as the party of the middle classes although fractions of these classes do vote in a different manner.

## REGIONAL VARIATIONS

The electoral choices of the middle classes become clearer if we look at groups of states having a different structure of electoral competition. Two things have emerged from the electoral experience of the nineties:

One is that electoral choices are made at the level of states rather than at the all-India level. Secondly, electoral choice is often determined by the nature of competition in a given state. The politics of the middle classes follow these two 'rules' that have been in operation almost since 1989. Therefore, Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 report data on electoral choices of middle-class respondents in different competitive frameworks.

Careful analysis of Tables 2 to 6 enables us to qualify our previous argument regarding the nexus between the middle classes and the BJP. In the first place, data show that Congress continues to attract

TABLE 2 PARTY PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES IN TWO PARTY STATES: 1996-98-99

(Madhya Pradesh (MP), Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Delhi)

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	45	43	34
BJP	45	50	50

Source Heath-Yadav 1999, p. 2524 for 1996 and 1998; CSDS Data Unit for 1999

TABLE 3 PARTY PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES IN LEFT DOMINATED STATES. 1996-98-99

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	37	29	19
Left Front	49	41	38
BJP & Allies	NA	27	30

Sources: As for Table 2 above.

TABLE 4. PARTY PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES IN STATES DOMINATED BY REGIONAL PARTIES. 1996-98-99

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	34	28	32
BJP	NA	25 (including allies)	10
Regional Parties	46	31	55

Note States included are Andhra Pradesh (AP), Assam, Goa, Meghalaya, Pondicherry, Punjab and Tamil Nadu (TN)

Source Heath-Yadav 1999, p. 2525 for 1996 and 1998; CSDS Data Unit for 1999.

TABLE 5 PARTY PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES IN BIHAR 1996-98-99

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	12	17	16
BJP	23	13	10
Samata	15	24	32
JD	43	-	-
RJD	-	28	15

Source: Heath-Yadav, 1999, pp. 2525-6 for 1996 and 1998

JD: Janata Dal, RJD: Rashtriya Janata Dal

TABLE 6. PARTY PREFERENCES OF MIDDLE CLASSES IN UTTAR PRADESH (UP): 1996-98-99

	1996	1998	1999
Congress	47	8	19
BJP	43	43	28
SP	25	30	18
BSP	14	12	9

Source: As for Table 5 above

SP: Samajwadi Party, BSP: Bahujan Samaj Party

substantial respondents from the middle classes in some regions. Except in UP, Bihar and West Bengal, around one-third of the respondents from the middle classes prefer the Congress. The second qualifier is that in many areas, the regional parties have emerged as the main choice of the middle class. When the BJP is in a weak position, the middle classes turn to regional formations. Third, high support for the Left Front (LF) (Table 3) suggests that the middle classes locate themselves as supporters of the winning formation at the local level. As challenges to the established formations grow, and as electoral competition becomes severe the middle classes begin shifting to BJP and its allies. This can be seen from the preferences of the middle classes in LF-dominated states in 1999 as well as in the case of Bihar. In Bihar, the Janata Dal (JD) was the recipient of middle-class votes in 1996. But as the opposition to Laloo Prasad consolidated through the BJP-Samata alliance, middle-class choice shifted to this alliance in 1999. Finally, from where does the BJP get its middle class support? The overwhelming support to BJP from the middle classes comes from

Gujarat, MP, Rajasthan, Delhi and UP. Thus, except Bihar, the middle classes of the Hindi belt appear to be more supportive of BJP while the middle classes in a large number of states support state-level political parties. Among the present allies of BJP, Akalis in Punjab, Samata party in Bihar, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and DMK in Tamil Nadu have strong support of middle-class voters in these respective states.

Yet another notable feature of middle class electoral choice is that it is almost invariably consistent with the choices of the upper and upper middle classes. Thus, data for 1996 and 1998 election surveys show that in states where about 50 per cent upper middle class respondents support the BJP and its allies, the middle class support for BJP and allies is also high (Heath-Yadav 1999, pp. 2524-6). This suggests that there is a clear cut identification among the middle classes with the upper sections of society. Since they perceive a commonality of interests among themselves and the upper classes these two classes tend to share a common politics.

In terms of electoral choices, then, the middle classes seem to have evolved a two-pronged strategy. They have a decided preference for the BJP. At the same time, they strive to locate themselves as supporters of the winning combination at the state level. Wherever possible, this state-level choice is a regional ally of the BJP. This strategy ensures on the one hand, ascendance of BJP as an instrument of the middle class and on the other hand, ensures access to control over public resources. As a result, even when a non-BJP formation comes to power at the state level, it follows the politics acceptable to middle classes to the extent that it is dependent upon middle classes. Often, this implies radical pro-poor rhetoric combined with market oriented political economy.

## II

Stereotypical lampooning of the politician is a favourite pastime commonly witnessed in middle class drawing rooms. Apart from the perception that politicians are corrupt, the politicians are criticized for their ignorance and for the pursuit of power. The middle classes tend to place high value on selflessness (among others, of course!) In contrast, politicians are seen as a self-seeking tribe.

### SEARCH FOR SANITIZED POLITICS

In this background, the middle classes tend to imagine a sanitized version of politics. There are two aspects to this sanitized politics. In

the first place, the middle classes want to reduce the chaos and noise involved in politics. Their notion of politics often prefers a two-party system to a multi-party situation. During the nineties, rise of coalitional politics has further strengthened this middle-class view of politics. In this same period, India had a volatile Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The CEC made efforts to impose restrictions on the timings of election rallies and processions. Banners and roadside graffiti were banned or restricted. Whatever may be the legal merit of such measures, it is relevant here to note that the middle class supported these measures enthusiastically because they fit into the middle-class idea of sanitized politics. These efforts were seen as attempts to 'regulate' the unruly democracy of the country.

The other aspect of the sanitized version of the politics of the nineties is the abhorrence of struggles and collective action in general. Again, in the nineties, middle classes and the media were enthusiastic in upholding some court rulings, which admonished parties for declaring *bandhs*—public closures of activity—as forms of protest. Strikes, sit-ins and demonstrative public action are seen as obstruction to peaceful civil life and also impediments to 'development' and 'progress'. At the basis of these sentiments, there lies a firm belief (in middle-class minds) that social issues can have a technocratic solution. In the view of the middle classes, politics is seen as an unavoidable baggage, a necessary nuisance. Politics is understood as empty rhetoric necessitated by the democratic ideology. The middle classes believe that politics is irrelevant; solutions to various issues are either 'economic' or technology-based. As such, politics has no salience, no legitimacy. Therefore, political activity is merely an unfortunate waste. One of the reasons for the attraction of the presidential form of government is the possibility of insulating the decision-making process by appointing experts. Issues concerning public policy are not seen as contestations of competing interests because the middle classes do not recognize contestability of policies. Policies are understood as universalized wisdom based on 'knowledge' and 'expertise'. The distrust of politicians and the notion of policy as the business of objective experts push the middle classes into the direction of bureaucracy and judiciary. The former is seen as the non-partisan and legitimate centre of decision-making and the latter as neutral arbiter. Politics and politician do not have a respectable place in this world view of the middle classes.

It may be argued that middle classes have always had this attitude to politics. However since the late 1980s some characteristics have emerged in Indian politics and public life, which bear a middle class

imprint. The foregoing sketch of middle-class attitudes becomes relevant in this context. The material and cultural power rather than numerical strength of the middle classes has been producing a certain kind of politics based on middle-class values and preferences.

### CONSENSUAL POLITICS

Over the years, the nature of political contestation is becoming more and more superficial. Politics is assuming a consensual character. On the one hand, politics consists of wild personal allegations and campaigns concentrating on one leader. On the other, the place of substantive issues is becoming marginal in the political process. Notwithstanding what the parties occasionally say, most parties now accept a new policy direction in the field of the economy. The partial winding up of the welfare state, market-based economy and globalization, have been accepted by both the main national parties, the Congress and the BJP. Apart from this consensus on economic policy, other areas of consensus are foreign policy and defence policy. The shift from non-alignment to a pro-US foreign policy has already occurred. In the field of defence, nuclearization has been upheld by a large section of the political establishment. Another aspect of consensus relates to the policy of reservations for the SC, ST and OBCs. Besides, all parties now accept the legitimacy of the claims of the OBCs. Thus, the area of fundamental contestation is shrinking rapidly. As political competition becomes more and more severe, conflicts over basic policy issues have virtually disappeared.

In the field of non-electoral politics, we can witness a decline in collective class action. This feature evolved since the mid-seventies with the erosion of trade union activity. But during the nineties, there has been a decline of all collective action, including action by white collar employees. Even the farmers' agitations, which occupied the centrestage until the mid-eighties, lost their mobilizational capacity. There has been a general failure in bringing pressures on the policy makers through collective action. The only collective action, which is thriving, is based on identity issues. It can be surmised that collective action as an instrument of furthering material interests is either not used or does not succeed.

### ?ROLIFERATION OF NGO ACTIVITY

So what other forms does political action take? With the loss of legitimacy in the case of collective struggles various social

groups have emerged. These groups, often with the help of donors take up the responsibility of providing knowledge, goods or services to certain sections of society. This activity is non-political in the sense that it is not organically affiliated to any party or larger movement. It is non-political also in the sense that such activity does not confront the state and the state's principles of distribution of resources. The emphasis is on building networks of development agencies. These efforts are familiarly known as non-government organizations (NGOs). The rise of NGOs has changed the political lexicon. Instead of class struggles and mass mobilizations, the voluntary sector has brought about words like empowerment, advocacy, networking, client population and so on. The needy are not seen as exploited or oppressed. Rather, they are described as disadvantaged sections. The definitions of disadvantaged groups may vary from donor to donor but they remain essentially non-class. The spurt in the number of NGOs indicates a new type of public activity that has come into existence in contemporary times.

The other form of public activity is recourse to the judiciary. In this case, the contestability of public policy and its implementation is realized. However, the contest does not take place in the realm of struggles and public pressure. Instead, it is articulated in the courts of law. Since the 1980s, the most common strategy adopted by activists has been juridification of various issues. This development is described as judicial activism, which probably compensates for the lack of public activism. Issues, where public pressure needs to be built, are taken to courts. Many NGOs are engaged in this process of juridification of contested issues. Thus the judicial interventions can be seen as part of the overall tilt towards 'NGOization' of the public sphere.

## NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Closely following this phenomenon, the nature of social movements is also changing. This change coincides with the decline of trade unions, the stagnation in the naxalite movement and the inability of the movement of agrarian labour to take off. Following the experience in Europe and North America, this trend may be described as the new social movements. The changing nature of social movements has been termed as the new social movements, in the context of India's political economy (Omvedt 1993). New issues have emerged in the post 1970-period as the foci of collective activity. As was the case in the west, the class perspective tended to underplay issues of gender, ethnicity, environment and development related distortions. These

issues were brought to the forefront by movements, which emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the West, the middle classes were in the forefront of these new movements (Offe 1985, Eder 1985).

In the Indian context, the shift in social action started taking place along with disenchantment with electoral or parliamentary politics. The non-party formations developed a critique of power politics. This critique became popular among the youth from middle classes. Similarly, the movements posited greater autonomy and moral authority in formations outside established parties. This was also appreciated by many sections of the middle classes. The environmental movement and the movement opposed to the Sardar Sarovar Project (Narmada Bachao Andolan, NBA) attained considerable fame and popularity during the eighties. Both these movements critiqued the path of development adopted by India since independence. In many cities and towns, groups have emerged who are devoted to this critique and who demand sustainable development, which will be eco-friendly and small scale.

Without going into the merits of these critiques and alternatives we need to look at the popular base of some of these new movements. The response of the Indian state to some of these issues has been interesting. For instance, separate government departments have been established for subjects like environment and women's welfare, apart from the establishment of human rights commission and women's commission. More interestingly, these three issues, gender, environment and rights, have been incorporated into university studies by the University Grants Commission (UGC). This suggests that the state has tried to satisfy media, intelligentsia and the urban middle classes by officially incorporating the issues involved. Such incorporation depoliticizes the issues and encourages NGO intervention rather than the mobilization of concerned social sections.

Most new social movements draw their leadership as well as their intellectual support from sections of the middle classes. These activists challenge both the authenticity of class action and the moral authority of the Indian state in respect of the realization of public interest. In order to validate their claims, the social movements seek to locate these claims on a universalist matrix of people's interests and notions of public good. Yet, most often, action is localized. Thus, localized action and universal claims are combined by these movements. The locus of actions and organizations invariably escape the two major axes of cleavage in Indian society viz. class and caste.

Perhaps it will be more appropriate to underline the fact that we

have, rather unjustly, discussed all social movements as constituting one group of public activity. It is a fact that radical elements exist within these movements. Some have already become alert to questions of capitalist economy (as in case of NBA *vis-à-vis* globalization) or the caste issue. Among social movements, there are serious challengers to the political establishment. But our purpose here is very limited. We only intend to emphasize that the non-party, non-class and non-caste movements find favour with middle class sensibilities. On their part, these movements too, are not averse to gaining middle class support. The NBA, thus, attempted to gain media attention and support among the middle class elite by capitalizing upon the glamour of Arundhati Roy, an author and publicist of considerable fame. Such instances highlight that middle class affinity is an important aspect of contemporary politics. More than the movements like the NBA, middle classes are attracted to various citizen forums, clean city activities, consumer associations, anti-slum and anti-hawkers urban movements, city greens, friends of animals and so on. The middle classes are in love with such diffuse and disparate activities because through such activities one can obtain a sense of moral fulfillment without necessarily burning one's fingers in agitations or without dirtying one's hands in politics.

## COMMUNALISM

We also need to look at the possible links between the middle classes and the politics of Hindu communalism. In section I we have already noted that BJP, which represents the Hindu community in the realm of party politics, is the preference of sizeable sections of the middle class. Besides that, the middle classes also tend to share the communal view point and support aggressive communalism.

Traditionally, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which spearheads Hindu communalism, drew its support from lower middle classes, white collar employees, traders etc. in the urban areas. The Jan Sangh, a political party of Hindutva politics (1951–77) was also supported by these social sections. Since the eighties, Hindu communalism became more inclusive in terms of its social base (caste) and adopted a very militant activist posture. It is possible to argue that a more diverse social composition of the middle class facilitated the broad basing of Hindu communalism. One cannot ignore the role of the middle classes in the agitation regarding 'Ramjanmbhoomi' at Ayodhya. As publicists the middle class brought the Ayodhya

issue to the centre of public discourse. As academicians, members of the middle classes developed historical, archeological and ideological arguments in favour of the agitation. As media persons, many members of the middle class working particularly with Indian language press presented a communal version of the issues involved. Above all, as supporters, the middle classes proudly asserted their political Hindutva. In these different roles, sections of middle classes played a crucial role in the shaping of communal politics in the late eighties and early nineties. Similarly, during 1999–2000, the middle classes extended sympathies to the campaign against Christian missionaries and to the anti-Christian propaganda in general. The Swadeshi movement, although dealing with economic issues like globalization, seeks to focus attention on cultural imperialism and onslaughts of western values. It is true that a small section of the middle classes is strongly opposed to communal politics. It is also true that some sections of the middle classes disapprove communal violence and disruption of public peace. However, politics of communalism would not have gained in status and legitimacy without the ideological support of the middle classes on the whole.

It can be hypothesized that the support by the middle classes to communalism originates in a cultural crisis. Middle classes in India are always faced with a predicament regarding self-identity. Internally this predicament originated from the fact that till very recently, the middle classes consisted of Brahmanical castes. The external dimension of this predicament is related to the modern world and modernity in general. A class, which at least in India, originated mainly as a product of modernity, the middle class has always been uncomfortable with modernity. This feeling can be traced to the misfit between modern liberal values and the caste location of the middle class. In the context of continuous interaction with new ideas and the world at large, the middle class has always felt culturally threatened. This perception leads the middle class to explore available resources in terms of traditional identity.

This has meant a definition of self with reference to the 'other'. The early Bengali intellectuals' response or the nineteenth century Maharashtrian response to the west and modernity betrays an achilles' heel: the then upcoming middle class did not want to align with the masses or the ordinary public for constructing a robust self-identity. This left them with only one option. That of constructing the self on the basis of the perception of 'other'. The Brahmanical identity of the middle class could be retained only by positing it as 'Hindi' identity.

vis à-vis the Muslim rulers, Christian missionaries, British rulers western' values, etc Independence did not resolve this problem entirely. The material interests of the middle classes were circumscribed by the existence of large numbers of poor and the caste interests of middle classes were strained by lower caste assertions. Therefore, communal politics thrived only after serious challenges emanated from a range of lower castes throughout the country Synthetic Hindutva and spurious traditional resources provided categories of cultural exclusion for the middle classes. In this sense, communalism has emerged as an important aspect of middle class polities.

### III

Two things follow from the foregoing discussion. In the first place, we can detect some dominant trends in middle-class politics such as preference for the BJP. Second, certain features of contemporary politics in India have close association with the middle classes. Consensus in the field of party politics, decline of collective class action, rise of new social movements and politics of communalism are these features. The role of middle classes in shaping these features is considerable. However, one does find many inconsistencies in middle class politics. The middle classes detest collective action by the lower classes but they themselves undertake collective action for protecting their economic interest. Similarly, middle classes provide status to many new types of social movements but at the same time they have contempt for movements which seek to mobilize the poor and the exploited sections. While the middle classes benefit from the prevalent path of development, they are attracted to critiques of this development. The middle classes are the repository of activists for both communalism and anti-communalism. These are only a few examples. The larger question is why are there such inconsistencies in the 'politics of middle classes'? And, is there any such thing as 'politics' of middle classes? What is the position of middle classes in relation to other classes—the bourgeoisie and the working classes?

### MIDDLE CLASS AS A CONCEPT

These questions require that we turn to the issue of conceptualizing the middle classes and theorizing the role of middle classes in a class society. Most discussions of middle class in the Indian context take place without situating the subject in the context of class society.

Middle classes are treated as intellectual leaders or elites (Varma 1998) Alternatively, middle class is understood exclusively in terms of incomes and consumption. Empirically founded conception of middle class is indeed necessary for operationalization but any conception of the middle class also needs to be organically rooted in the class theory.

The middle classes can be visualized as being those sections of society which possess the following characteristics: i) although direct/actual ownership of means of production may be very limited extensive and effective control over means of production ii) non productive realm of activity, mostly service sector, white collar occupations involving intellectual labour (even in industry, supervision and management occupations) iii) control over systems of knowledge, administration, opinion formation and culture, etc iv) a prominent position in consumer market and resultant emphasis on lifestyle v) high social status irrespective of economic position (Palshikar 1997). It has been persuasively argued that in modern, advanced capitalist societies, class relations shape on the basis of material factors in conjunction with organizational and knowledge assets (Wright 1985). One group of scholars insists that the formation of middle class must be considered in the context of the process of capital accumulation (Johnson 1982, pp. 93–103). Following this, the middle class is seen as a class which is called into existence for the purposes of a) supervision and control of labour process (managers, supervisors etc.), b) reproduction of capitalist social relations (teachers, social workers, administrators etc.) c) accounting and realization of value (professionals in banking, accounting, finance etc.) and d) transformation of technical means of production (scientists, engineers etc.) (Burris 1980, p. 29 quoted in Johnson 1982, p. 97).

### CONTRADICTORY CLASS LOCATIONS

In trying to comprehend the nature of the middle classes, one important issue needs to be resolved. As a class standing between the two polar classes, what role do the middle classes perform in the process of exploitation and domination? It is clear from Burris' argument summarized above, that the middle class facilitates exploitation, legitimizes domination and partially shares in surplus. However Carchedi (1978) and Wright (1985) have rightly pointed out that this class is both the exploiter and the exploited. Most sections of the middle class are themselves exploited and dominated. This

leads to what Wright describes as contradictory class location (Wright 1985, pp. 42–57). Wright's argument that groups situated on contradictory locations do not constitute a class but exist between the two classes in a contradictory state is debatable. However, two important points emerge from his argument. One is that there are groups, which are both exploiters and exploited. The other point is that this dual character produces contradiction in the existence material interests and social outlook of these groups distinguishing them from the bourgeoisie and the working classes.

The middle classes have clarity about the opposition between their material interests and those of the poor (Wright 1985, p. 285). On the other hand, the middle classes have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the capitalist class. They tend to uphold capitalism as a system. Their critique of capitalism is informed by moralism and humanism. At the same time, the middle classes critique capitalism for allowing them a very limited share in surplus. Even though they objectively have material interests in common with the capitalist class, the middle classes distinguish themselves for possessing human capital and claim greater share from the bourgeoisie. This puts them in an uncomfortable competition as well as partnership with the bourgeoisie. Antagonism with the interests of the working classes (seen as poor, manual labourers, etc.) and subordination, experienced in the competition with the bourgeoisie give unity to the middle classes. At the same time, the middle classes are internally fractionalized into administrators, professionals, semi autonomous employees and old petty bourgeoisie (Johnson 1982, pp. 179–202). These fractions pursue their own politics separately and also evolve a common set of political strategies. The implication of this dialectic of unity and division of the middle classes is that they may simultaneously develop an independent politics and also align with the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Contradictory objective locations imply contradictory subjective politics (Oppenheimer 1982, p. 131).

### FRACTIONS OF INDIA'S MIDDLE CLASS

In the light of the perspective provided by the class theory we may now revisit the issues pertaining to the politics of India's middle classes. We have been referring to the middle classes in the plural because of the diversity of groups consisting of the middle in Indian society. English education during the colonial period, state sponsored welfare

administration machinery in the post-independence period and the changes in India's occupational structure produced by the political economy in the post-1980 period have historically shaped India's middle classes and their political action.

Middle classes in contemporary India may still be numerically dominated by the old type, i.e. those belonging to government bureaucracy, banking and insurance administration, teachers, etc. However the overall attitude and conceptions of success and lifestyle are undoubtedly produced and dominated by what may be termed as 'the new middle class' sections. These are the products of the changing economic structure, new technologies (electronic and information) and new professions. These new middle class sections are upwardly mobile, more comfortable with the upper class and soaked in instrumental rationality. The so-called consumerism has emerged as an important hallmark of good life among the middle class. Hedonism resulting from this lifestyle is often balanced by pseudo-spiritual remedies, by modern time gurus and spiritual healers of various hues. The contradictory nature of the middle class lies in the fact that although it continues to be dominated numerically by the 'old' sections, its identity and expression have already been based on the value system of the newer sections.

Apart from this somewhat nebulous division between the old and the new sections, the middle class in contemporary India is firmly divided between the lower echelons and the upper strata. Parly, this division is based on occupational hierarchy. Both in administration and industry, the lower echelons have many things in common with the workers except that the lower middle class sections have middle class aspirations and expectations and they firmly identify themselves as middle class. This identification tends to intervene with the objective commonality between the lower middle with the working classes. The upper sections of the middle class are more articulate in identifying themselves with the dominant material interests in society. In the context of the globalizing economy, the upper sections are more outward looking while their lower counterparts feel threatened with the possibility of getting pushed to the ranks of the working class. This distance produces cultural and political ambivalence among the middle classes as a whole.

Since the 1970s, the social composition of India's middle classes is becoming more and more diverse. Many members of the middle class now belong to rural agrarian background. It is also observed

that minorities, SCs, STs and OBCs constitute half of the middle class population (Sheth 1999, p. 2509). It is a moot question how caste and class interact. Sheth has argued that middle class identity supercedes caste identity in some respects (*ibid.*). To the extent this observation is valid, the possibilities of middle-class politics also become real. It would also mean that the gap between the urban and rural sections too, will be overcome in the time to come. Such a situation will affect the traditional competition among the urban and rural sections of India's ruling classes. Further, supersession, of caste identities among members of the middle class would affect the nature of caste politics in the country. There are already indications of this in two respects. First, growing numbers of rural and OBC voters are turning to BJP; second, the politics of backward castes (otherwise known as OBC politics) does not seem to be moving any further during the nineties. These may be the results of the changing composition of the middle classes.

## IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

### *Politics*

Given its contradictory location and the internal tensions arising from its composition, one cannot expect the middle classes to manifest strong and durable political loyalties. Therefore, the middle class preference for the BJP, throughout the nineties, must be seen in cultural as well as political context. In pure party political or electoral terms, the middle classes may not have much patience for the BJP. It is possible that the lower echelons of the middle classes would be won over by the opposition parties. But two things seem to be very probable. One is that shifting loyalties of the middle class will determine the electoral outcomes in India for some time to come. Second, middle classes will not allow radicalization of politics or the formation of left radical platform. The nineties have already witnessed this trend. All political confrontation takes place around the issue of communalism vs. secularism. The displacement of questions of economy and poverty from the arena of political competition is the main feature of politics since the mid-1980s. This trend will continue. Therefore, like in the West, politics will have to focus on the issues of quality of life, meaning of good life, democratization and community identities.

### *Political economy*

It is a well known fact that the middle classes enthusiastically upheld the shift in India's economic policy. Within the new framework of political economy, the state is expected to actively facilitate market forces. On the other hand, the new dispensation weakens the structural requirements for the poor. This brings into focus the role of the state as a welfare agency. The middle classes look upon welfare as a waste. They believe, in the first place, that individual initiative is the fundamental requirement for confronting poverty. Second, they have faith in the efficiency of markets in effecting the distribution of wealth across society. Therefore, subsidies, doles, reservations are stoutly detested by the middle classes. 'What is least popular with the middle mass are programmes that benefit those supposedly morally inferior categories (such as unemployed youth and single parents) and ascriptively defined minorities' (Offe 1987, pp. 532-3). In India, direct attack on the welfare state has not occurred but the legitimacy and ideological basis of the welfare state is fast eroding.

### *Ideology*

As a prelude to the actual withdrawal of the state from welfare activity, changes are taking place in the structure of public discourse and the construction of a new ideological framework. The middle-class intellectuals, professionals and economists are at the forefront of this ideological exercise. Experts are labouring to justify not only the process of globalization but the disbandment of welfare responsibility of the state. In this process, notions of nation-state, citizenship and public interest are being drastically redefined to suit a new hegemonic order. In the early nineties, some (English) newspapers started periodic publication of opinion polls. These were often based on a sample from major urban centres. The obvious implication was that the opinion of metropolitan residents constituted public opinion. By the end of the nineties, a majority of newspapers (both English and non-English) have started the practice of publishing opinions expressed through the internet. In fact, the participants in such polls are described as netizens. Although no theorization has yet appeared, the new nation of the middle classes is constituted by NRIs and netizens. Therefore, public interest now means interests of these sections. Such constructions of the notions of 'citizen' and 'public interest' would help theorization

for the exclusion of the multitude of poor from access to public resources as well as access to information. This ideological shift is reflected in the public discourse as well. The delegitimization of welfare as an idea and of pro-poor policies as the focus of state are crucial phenomena defining middle-class politics in contemporary Indian society. The language now popular both among NGOs and political parties consists of notions like governance (good governance), infrastructure development, social sector development, human resources, capacity building, social capital, etc. Social science publications and media columns are dominated by these notions and the ideological emphasis implicit in them. For the middle class in any case, these are better words than the dirty and dangerous words like welfare, social justice or equal opportunity.

### *Alliances*

As in the case of the middle class in general, the discussion of the Indian middle class also stumbles on the question of possible alliances. Given the large (and growing) size of the middle classes and their ideological power, the role of the middle classes is going to be more and more significant and central in politics. Projections of the probable role of the middle class range from a more progressive role for those strata being pushed toward the working class condition to the bulk of the middle class moving decisively to the right (Johnson 1982, p. 270). The former projection is based on the expectation that as the composition of middle class becomes more diverse, it will take a progressive turn. The latter is based on the historical experience of Germany and Chile. But ultimately, any projection will also be based on the economic situation and the class situation in a given society. Concerned scholars and activists in Europe and North America have been arguing on the basis of what they perceive as the crisis in the economy that middle classes will be pushed toward a 'progressive' role. Also, they realize that progressive politics will not be possible without the cooperation from sections of the middle classes. Thus, Wright suggests, that radical democratic struggles have to incorporate sections of contradictory class locations in order to expand the very horizon of historical possibilities (Wright 1985, pp. 286–90).

We have already noted that the composition of the middle classes in India is becoming considerably diverse. Besides, there has been a sizeable body of radical, anti-establishment background among the new entrants to the middle

the women dalits and OBCs Third

the 'old' middle class also had a tradition of intellectuals aligning with a range of radical, transformative ideas and struggles. Fourth, the lower echelons of the middle classes have already started feeling the pinch of the new, globalizing economic order, recruitments have stopped in the public sector, the contract system is gaining ground in the private sector, disinvestment plans threaten the displacement (through golden handshakes) of a large number of government and private sector employees, the economy is driven more by forces of finance capitalism, stock exchanges and speculation than by the growth of industry. Globalization of the market is turning out to be a one way process, foreign direct investments have not been enough and are certainly not generating employment. All these push the lower middle class into the realm of uncertainties. These factors suggest that an alliance between the middle classes and the working class may after all be realizable.

However, what appears probable in theory, may elude in reality. At least two factors suggest that an alliance between India's middle classes and the toiling masses may yet be distant. First, the experience of the nineties is not encouraging in this regard. With the shift in India's economy since the 1980s two developments have taken place in India's class situation. On the one hand, the middle class grew rapidly in size. In India's workforce, more and more people are being placed on middle class location. On the other hand, disintegration of the organized working class took place. More and more people from urban workforce are now working in the unorganized or informal section. Their universe is surrounded by insecurities and uncertainties. This sector includes salesmen, agents, attendants, coolies, rag pickers, taxi and auto rickshaw drivers, hawkers, vendors, road side stall owners, phone booth operators, small-time technicians, operators, and so on. In other words, to speak of India's working class is really to speak of persons engaged in this vast range of occupations. It is estimated that 90 per cent of India's total work force is in the unorganized sector. Even among workers engaged in manufacturing activity, 75 per cent are unorganized (Dutt 1997, p. 12).

Therefore, to consider possibilities of an alliance between the middle class and the working class means considering the alliance with this vast population of unorganized labour. Sections of the middle class may not be averse to cooperate with unionized working class in the industrial sector. However, the middle class is not at all prepared to cooperate with the unorganized sector as an ally. In urban locations, middle classes have in fact repeatedly opposed the demands of this

section. Today's middle class looks down upon unorganized urban poor much in the same way as the middle class of yester years looked down upon blue collar workers: with contempt, suspicion and unease. Just as middle farmers align with rich farmers against agricultural labourers, urban middle classes ally with the rich *vis-à-vis* the unorganized sector. Given the fact that India's contemporary class situation consists of the unorganized sector as the numerical mainstay of the working class, the possibility of an alliance between the middle class and the working class is not very bright.

Second, the last quarter of the twentieth century was witness to the disappearance of class based action and union activity. In fact, class issues have been displaced by many new issues taken up by social movements and NGOs. As a result, there is no pressure on the middle class. The attitudes and politics of middle classes are shaped by class struggle and by pressure from lower classes to align with them.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of such pressures, the middle classes avoid taking a progressive turn. The decline of struggles by India's working classes accounts for the value structure of the middle classes. The nineties have produced a class situation where the bourgeoisie are on the ascendance and concrete political struggles are absent. This has emboldened the middle classes to pursue their separate interests and align with the bourgeoisie. Besides, the social cultural existence of the middle classes in India has been well insulated from the working classes. This helps the middle classes to ignore ideological pressures arising from the condition of India's poor. Growing affluence of the middle classes has further insulated them materially and physically from the masses. The Indian state, through its law-enforcing and welfare institutions, also takes care that the middle classes should be protected from the lay public: in educational institutions (separate government schools for the poor) in health (government hospitals for the poor), housing (middle income housing is separate from low income housing in urban localities) etc. Such insulation in life and ideas denies any possibility of an alliance between the middle classes and the working classes. A segmented civil society is unlikely to produce a radical alliance of the two.

Somewhat inconclusively, this essay argues that the middle classes occupy contradictory class locations, which determine the politics of middle classes. In contemporary India, the middle classes are in a

<sup>1</sup>This point was brought into the discussion by Heinz Gerhard Haupt in the course of the seminar at Neemrana. I am grateful to him.

position to pursue their own politics. Thus, the present can be described as the moment of the middle classes. Whether the middle classes position themselves as the architect of hegemony or become a target of a radical and explosive attack from the working classes will depend both upon their precarious internal unity thinly balanced on their contradictory location and the unfolding of the class situation in India.

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## Middle-class Values and the Changing Indian Entrepreneur

• Gurcharan Das

In this essay I shall examine shifting middle class values through the changing work role, social origins, and perceptions of the Indian entrepreneur. Although the middle class is composed of many occupations, commerce has always been at the centre—as the businessman mediated between the landed upper classes and the labouring lower classes. Hence, one ought to be able to learn something about middle-class values through a better understanding of the entrepreneur. I shall focus especially on the past decade and the divide that has emerged between entrepreneurs of the so-called 'old' and the 'new' economy.

When the history of India's twentieth century is written, two trends will be noticed. One is the entrepreneurial surge in the last decade after 1991; the other is the expansion of the middle class in the last two decades of the century after 1980. The former came about with the economic reforms and the latter accompanied the rise in economic growth. After growing at an average rate of 3.5 per cent a year from 1950 to 1980, India's economic growth rate increased to 5.6 per cent in the decade of the eighties. It climbed further to 6.3 per cent in the decade of the nineties. In these two decades the middle class more than tripled.

This essay is partially born of experience—from my thirty-five years as a manager, consultant, and lately, venture capitalist. I have borrowed heavily from my recent book *India Unbound* (Knopf, New York 2001), in preparing this essay.

The surge in new start-ups is the result of several factors. One, it is easier to get started because the barrier of licensing went away in the 1991 economic reforms. Two, dramatic improvements in communication and information technology have opened up new business possibilities. For example, interactive educational services over the web, or delivering Indian television content to non-resident Indians abroad, making it possible for newcomers to challenge incumbents by redefining existing businesses. Three, the same technologies make it possible for global companies to outsource their administrative and technology-related services from lower cost countries like India. Fourth, at no time in history has there been such an abundance of venture capital available to a person with an idea to get started. Between 1998–2000, \$2.5 billion in venture capital funds have come into India (McKinsey's studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between the availability of venture funds and the proliferation of business start-ups). Five, the extraordinary success of young Indians in Silicon Valley has served as a role model to inspire start-ups in Bangalore, Chennai, Gurgaon, Pune, etc.

## THE NEW ENTREPRENEUR

As a result of these trends, a new kind of entrepreneur has emerged in India. He or she is better educated and is often not from the traditional Bania caste. This is not surprising because the first lot to figure out where opportunities lie in the new 'knowledge economy' are the educated. In Japan during the Meiji Restoration (1868), the better educated samurai became the first entrepreneurs. Of the fifty firms that came up between the Restoration and the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), twenty-three belonged to the upper class samurai, while only twelve belonged to the traditional merchant class. The new type of entrepreneur is aided by low capital costs and the low cost of entry in knowledge based services in today's global economy.

Although the reforms after 1991 have been slow, hesitant and incomplete, they have set in motion a process of profound change in Indian society. They are as important a turning point in India as Deng's revolution in China in December 1978. Since the reforms, making money has become increasingly respectable and the sons of Brahmins and Kshatriyas are getting MBAs and want to become entrepreneurs. India is in the midst of a social revolution rivalled, perhaps only by the ascent of the entrepreneur during the 1868 Meiji

Restoration, which helped transform Japan from an underdeveloped group of islands into a thriving modern society and economy

Indians have not traditionally accorded a high place to making money. Hence, the merchant or Bania is placed third in the four-caste hierarchy, behind the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, and only a step ahead of the labouring Shudra. My family too shared in the low opinion of commerce and merchants. Belonging to the Arora subcaste we regarded ourselves as Kshatriyas, superior to the Bania trading castes. Aroras and Khatri were the main Hindu castes of urban Punjab, and because of administrative ability they had been functionaries at the princely courts. Despite their low opinion of Banias they were not above money lending, however.

### SCHUMPETER'S ENTREPRENEUR

It is to Joseph Schumpeter, the Austrian economist at Harvard, that we owe our contemporary use of the word 'entrepreneur'. He took an old word from the economic dictionary and used it to describe this revolutionary instrument of the capitalist system. Capitalism is dynamic and brings growth, Schumpeter explained, because the entrepreneur introduces technological or organizational innovations, which result in new or cheaper ways of making things or ways of making wholly new things. These innovations create a flow of income that is not explained either by the contribution of labour or capital. The new process enables the innovating capitalist to produce the same goods at a lower cost, this differential in cost raises his profit until the other capitalists learn the same trick. What is important here is that this profit is not due to inherited or God-given advantages but it springs from the will and intelligence of the innovator.

The new money flow is not permanent 'rent' but a transient profit. The innovator is not a 'normal' businessman, following established practices and norms; nor is he or she a representative of a social class, but is someone who introduces discontinuous change in economic life, combining the element of production or service in a new way. On the heels of the innovator, said Schumpeter, come a swarm of imitators, and soon everyone wants to invest in the new idea. Banks get busy making loans to the imitators and there is a rush of capital spending. Everyone begins to talk of a boom.

As with all booms, however, supply soon shoots ahead of demand, and suddenly there is huge excess capacity. With competition, prices are quickly forced down and profits begin to decline as business once

again becomes a routine. As profits disappear, so does investment and this leads to a bust. Schumpeter's entrepreneur falls as well squeezed out of his share of income, ironically, by the very dynamics of the process that he set in motion. Schumpeter called this process 'creative destruction'.

The individual that emerges from his vision is a romantic, tragic figure. Since this is not a profession or a position that is handed down from one generation to the next, the entrepreneur is not a glamorous leader like a general or a statesman. Nor is he a respected member of the business class. Yet, he craves for social esteem and respect:

When his economic success raises him up socially he has no cultural tradition or attitude to fall back on, but moves about in society as an upstart, whose ways are readily laughed at, and we understand why this type has never been popular... (Schumpeter 1949).

Why then does the entrepreneur carry out his precarious and often thankless task? Schumpeter says that

there is the dream and the will to found a private dynasty—then there is the will to conquer the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success itself, but of success itself. Finally, there is the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply of exercising one's energy and imagination (*Ibid.*, p. 80).

## A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

In Schumpeter's days certainly, but even till recently old money did look down contemptibly on new money. Over the centuries, the newly rich were objects of scorn and derision. But now, perhaps for the first time in history, the new millionaires are looked up to with pride and even reverence. For they are a new meritocracy—highly educated entrepreneur-professionals who are creating value by innovating in the global knowledge economy. In September 1999, *Business Standard* published a list of 100 Indian billionaires, in which eight out of the top ten were first generation entrepreneurs. Six out of the top ten had made their fortunes in the knowledge industries. They did not inherit wealth, nor did they have a family name. They had risen on the back of their talent, hard work, and professional skills. They reflect a new social contract of post-reform India where talent, hard work and managerial skill have replaced inherited wealth and are expected to create millions of jobs and transform our society. This is one of the most exciting developments of our time.

## A DIVIDE HAS EMERGED IN BUSINESS

It has become increasingly clear that a definite divide has emerged in Indian business. One is the new, vibrant world of knowledge based, globally competitive companies in software, Internet, information technology enabled industries, generic pharmaceuticals, and entertainment. The second is the world of the old family business houses, which is hopelessly diversified in a vast number of commodity businesses. Its joint ventures with foreign partners are unravelling and it cries for protection.

With the coming of the reforms in 1991, money making again became respectable, and the old business houses suddenly acquired the esteem and power that had eluded them for fifty years. However, socialist controls had so emasculated them that they did not know how to respond to the new competitive climate. Like hungry children, they began to set up joint ventures promiscuously with foreigners, without a thought to their own capabilities. They expanded capacities unthinkingly. When the recession came in 1997, supply was hopelessly ahead of demand and they were in trouble. The joint ventures began to come apart as foreigners realized that their Indian partners were not up to the mark—they had neither the competence nor the capital. Hence, the Bombay Club began to clamour for protection.

Today, ten years after the reforms, the old industrialists are floundering. They have still not acquired the skills to succeed in the global economy. They continue with a 'factory mindset' when the industrial age is disappearing. If old India Inc is in trouble, fortunately there is a new India Inc emerging. The 1991 reforms released the long-suppressed commercial energies of young Indians who have a new mindset. The world has also changed seemingly to India's advantage. Unlike the industrial age, the information age speaks of our strengths. Indians appear to be better at conceptual thinking than in tinkering (possibly because of a Brahminical contempt for manual work). This explains why our knowledge industries—software, information technology related services, generic pharmaceuticals and digital entertainment—are succeeding in the global economy.

There are many things that set apart the new breed of entrepreneurs from the old style businessmen but they also have fewer inspectors to contend with. The new ones take pride in the ethical way they build their businesses. They think what they are doing is significant to their country and not just themselves. They work in teams rather than alone, they like to share wealth with their people (as stock options—because

of the comparisons with the global labour market); they build organizations that are open and non-hierarchical; they set global benchmarks for themselves, and the main asset they have is knowledge and an ability to earn the trust and respect of others—not money, not networking or lobbying skills.

On a cautionary note it is worth noting that the entrepreneur's job is not qualitatively different between the 'old' and 'new' economies. In the end there is only one economy. The entrepreneur's success always lay in his ability to take advantage of the new technologies. It has become increasingly clear that the biggest beneficiaries of new technologies will be the established companies who mobilize the new tools, such as the Internet to dramatically lower their costs and find new ways to grow. What will separate the winning entrepreneurs from the losing ones will be the ability to innovate and bring discontinuity to the market. The difference between the past and the present is the easier availability of venture capital and the fact that one needs less money to get started in today's service economy than one needed in the old manufacturing economy. Thus, two entry barriers have been lowered.

## NEW ENTERPRISE

Young Indians are no longer embarrassed about wanting to be rich. Hence, the spirit of the nineties is reflected in the vast number of rags to riches stories. This is not surprising. It has happened in many countries in periods of economic expansion. The reforms have released bottled-up energies and created a new confidence among young people and there is a feeling that 'they can do it'. Whereas a government job was the route to success in the previous generation, now the thing to do is to go into business. Money is replacing power and privilege.

The most famous success story of the knowledge economy is Infosys which started out with Rs 10,000 capital, in February 2000, it was worth over Rs 660,000 million, and more than one hundred of its managers were worth over a million dollars each. Another is NIIT, which has franchised (like McDonald's hamburgers) over 1000 computer schools in Indian bazaars and in thirty-one countries. It plans to become the world leader in computer education. Over the last decade, it has created 750 entrepreneurs and 10,000 jobs. In February 2000, Azim Premji became the third richest man in the world on *Forbes* rankings based on the market capitalization of his software

company (Wipro), which crossed 2 trillions or 11.3 per cent of India's GDP.

Subhash Chandra used to be a rice trader and today he has built a worldwide media empire that is worth over \$2 billion; he is called the Murdoch of Asia. A tiny, two-year old company in Bangalore called Armedia recently achieved a breakthrough in designing a chip for digital TV. America's Broadcom bought it for \$67 million and made its forty-three employees rich beyond their wildest dreams. Ranbaxy, Dr. Reddy's Labs, Cipla and Wockhardt are building successful global businesses in generic drugs. Rajesh Jain's Internet sites were so powerful that Satyam Infoways bought them for Rs 499 crores (\$115 million)—a nice return on Rs 20 lakhs (\$46,000) that he invested five years ago. Twenty thousand Indians are employed in on-line 'remote services', transcribing medical records, editing books, making digital maps, doing payroll accounts for customers around the world, and McKinsey projects that this could grow to 2 million jobs earning \$20 billion revenues by 2008.

The commercial spirit is not limited to the cities. The smallest village has found it. As I recounted in *India Unbound*, on a visit to Pondicherry from Madras a few years ago, I stopped at a roadside village cafe, where 14-year old, low caste Raju was hustling between the tables. He served us good South Indian coffee and *vadas*. Raju told us that this was his summer job and it paid Rs 400 (\$12) a month—enough to pay for computer lessons in the evenings in the neighbouring village. For the next summer, his aunt in Madras had arranged a job for him in a computer company.

'What will you do when you grow up?' I asked. 'I am going to run a computer company', said Raju. He had decided this when 'I saw it in TV, where this man, Bilgay [sic], has a software company and he is the richest man in the world'

In Bartoli, a sleepy village of 600 families in the heart of feudal Uttar Pradesh, a government school teacher lamented, 'Everyone has become money minded. The poorest chamar—the lowest caste of leather workers—are removing their children from my school and putting them into this newfangled private 'English' school, which opened six months ago. Can you believe it—they are willing to spend Rs 30 a month of their hard-earned money when it costs one rupee a month in my school!' They were leaving his school 'because they watch TV; they want learn English, they want to get rich. This is what happens when the low castes get uppity. No one wants to work on the land'

Fateh Singh a chamar comp a ned that h s grown up nephew

Vikas, wanted to set up a factory to make steel trunks in nearby Khurja rather than become a conductor in the state-run bus company like his father. Indians are slowly realizing that economic reforms are not only about tariff levels, deregulation and structural adjustment. They are about a revolution in ideas, which is changing the mindset of the people.

### OLD ENTREPRENEURS

The old business houses, on the other hand, are struggling in the competitive economy created by the reforms. The dilemma of Rahul Bajaj is typical of the old companies. Bajaj is the clear leader in the world's second largest scooter and two wheeler market. Yet, he is scared and unable to take the next step, which is to become a global player. He has the world's lowest costs; he has successfully withstood the challenge of Japanese competitors on his home ground, he is cash rich—making more profit than all his competitors put together. But, he exports only 3 per cent of his output. Despite his awesome advantages, Bajaj does not have the confidence to take on the Honda and Yamaha in the world market.

A decade ago, no one would have even thought of criticizing Rahul Bajaj for not thinking globally. Government rules did not permit him to have a foreign operation, or buy equity of a foreign company, or import components at a reasonable tariff, or expand capacity at will, or buy new technology without a lengthy approval process. Rahul Bajaj had a purely local mindset of a shortage economy. He sold everything he produced, because demand was always ahead of supply—for a decade, there was a ten-year waiting period for his scooter. Thus, he never developed marketing or product development skills. Rahul Bajaj is a creature of Nehruvian socialism and the Licence Raj. The legacy of forty years of a closed economy has caught up with him. He is the symbol of the old India, hobbled by poor infrastructure, obstructionist bureaucrats, high tariffs and interest costs and a 'factory mindset'.

Rahul Bajaj looms large on the Indian industrial horizon like a tragic figure. Having built a great company, he now seeks survival rather than leadership in the global economy. Similarly, the older Indian groups are creatures of a system they did not create. They do not have the skills to succeed in the global economy. Hence, eight years into the reforms, they are still floundering. Success in the global economy needs three things—massive investment in human resources;

a tinkerer's passion for product improvement, and a deeply caring attitude for customers. These companies are smart and they understand this. Then, why haven't they acquired these skills? The answer is that it takes time to change from doing what you have been doing successfully. But time is precisely what they do not have.

## ORIGINS OF INDIAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

India's industrialists rose from the bazaar. Their roots in industry are relatively recent, going back largely to the First World War. Before that they were traders and moneylenders engaged in the hustle and bustle of the bazaar. Even in Bombay and Ahmedabad, in western India, where the cotton textile mills came up earlier, in the last half of the nineteenth century, it was the trading communities who became industrialists. These were Parsees, Khojas, and Bhatia traders of Bombay and Jain Banias in Ahmedabad.<sup>1</sup>

Today's Indian industrialists, thus, originated in the old merchant castes, and their dominance has continued. Fifteen of the twenty largest industrial houses in 1997 were of Vaishya or Bania trading castes. Eight were Marwaris. Similarly, in contemporary Pakistan, most of the twenty-two families, who reputedly own half the nation's wealth, are Kutchi Memons, the leading Muslim trading caste of undivided India. Although they came late, after the First World War, Marwaris became the most successful. They came from Marwar, the old Jodhpur state in Rajasthan in northwest India. The most successful families came from the small Shekhavati region in the old Bikaner and Jaipur states. They were all Bania by caste and either Jains or Vaishnav Hindus by religious persuasion. Of the 128 Marwari sub-castes in Rajasthan only five became big and prominent in national commerce—Maheshwaris, Oswals, Aggarwals, Porwals and Khandelwals.

## MARWARIS

For centuries Marwaris had been bankers and helped finance the land trade between the East and the West. This was partly because

<sup>1</sup>Rajat Ray (ed.) (1992), *Entrepreneurship and Industry in India 1800–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi pp. 42–44. The great textile magnates of Bombay in the nineteenth century were the Petits, Wadias, and Tatas (Parsis), the Currimbhoyys (Khojas), the Sassoons (Baghdadi Jews), the Khaitans, Gokuldases, Thakarseys (all Bhatias from Kutch). In Ahmedabad the leaders were Jain banias—the Sarabhaias and Lalbhais who had been prominent shroffs although Nagar Brahmins had

the great trade route passed through northern Rajasthan. During the Mughal days, they were financiers to many princes, including the Emperor's family. Kasturbhai Lalbhai's family was one of them. Jagat Seth, a Marwari Oswal, was banker to the nawabs of Bengal. Not only was he a nawab-maker, but he was also a friend of Clive's and played a part in the conspiracy at Plassey, which changed the history of India and Britain. Colonel Tod, the historian of Rajasthan, noted that in 1832, 'nine-tenths of the bankers and commercial men of India are natives of Maroo des, and these chiefly of the Jain faith' (Todd 1829-32, p. 166). As the British created a national market during the nineteenth century there was a huge migration of Marwari traders into the smallest and remotest villages of India. The migrants began as petty shopkeepers (often with capital advanced from a wholesaler from their own community) and slowly graduated to money lending, and moved up to financing farmers for their commercial crops, opium and cotton. The arrival of the railways accelerated the process.

Some Marwaris became hugely successful and created large firms, such as Tarachand Ghanshyamdas, with whom the Birlas were proud to be associated when they first came to Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century. They had branches in the major seaports at Bombay and Calcutta, on the river ports along the Ganges, and throughout the opium and cotton growing areas. The firm took deposits, gave loans, engaged in the wholesale trade of commodities, transferred funds for clients to distant cities, cashed bills of trade, insured shipments, and speculated on commodity futures when the opportunity arose. In such a firm, trading and banking were closely interlinked and every firm was a money lender. Some firms were exclusively bankers; they were called 'shroffs'. These 'great firms', as Tom Timberg calls them in his well-known book, *The Marwaris*, also lent money to the princely families. For example, Bhagoti Ram Poddar, the founder of Tarachand Ghanshyamdas, was banker to the royal families of Jaipur, Bikaner and Hyderabad (Timberg 1978).

The Marwaris achieved their biggest successes in the British trading post of Calcutta. They smelled the chance for big money and flocked there to become brokers and agents to the British (who called them 'banians'). (Ramdutt Goenka was a typical example. He came to Calcutta in 1830. Starting as a clerk in a Marwari firm, he gradually became a broker to the major English firms. Nathuram Saraf began as a clerk

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set up the first mills) (*ibid.*) Other prominent commercial communities were Guptas and Aggarwals in the North and Chettiar in the South.

in Ramdutt Goenka's firm and graduated to become a 'banian' to other British firms. He opened a free hostel for migrants from the Shekhavati area of Rajasthan and G D Birla used to say that this hostel spawned many entrepreneurial careers. At night, the young apprentices would exchange stories of their commercial exploits of the day and draw lessons from them. Some of these stories became legendary. Passed on by word of mouth for generations, it was their version of Harvard Business School cases. The arrival of the Delhi-Calcutta railway in the 1860s quickened the migration to Calcutta and by the turn of the century, Marwaris had become dominant in the jute and cotton trade. During World War I, they made spectacular profits speculating in cotton, jute and hessian, and these profits laid the foundation for many industrial careers after the War.

Why the Marwaris turned out to be so spectacularly successful had a lot to do with their wonderful support system, explains Timberg. When a Marwari travelled on business, his wife and children were cared for in a joint family at home. Wherever he went in search of trade, he found shelter and good Rajasthani food in a *basa*, a sort of collective hostel run on a cooperative basis or as a philanthropy by local Marwari merchants. G D. Birla's grandfather, Shiv Narian settled in a *basa* when he first came to Bombay in the 1860s. When a Marwari needed money, he borrowed from another Marwari trader on the understanding that the loan was payable on demand, 'even at midnight', and he would reciprocate with a similar loan. At the end of the year, they tallied and settled the interest. He could count on community banks to insure his goods in transit and collect his dues when the goods arrived. His sons and nephews were apprenticed to other Marwari traders, where they earned their salary through profit sharing, learned business skills, and accumulated capital to start their own business when they were ready.

Marwaris are socially conservative. They took to English education much later than the Bengalis, for example. But now they have caught up. Their children routinely get MBAs and have a similar way of life as other professionals. Nevertheless, they are more religious and tradition continues to have a greater hold. Although professional executives run their businesses, most of them are from their community. And though they engage in the most sophisticated enterprises, their strength lies in the way they use old family networks and traditional accounting and financial controls. The Birlas, for example, monitor the financial performance of their companies on a daily basis.

Why some groups in society become entrepreneurs and others

Io not is an old question. I am not sure that there is a satisfactory answer, but I find that merchants everywhere seem to become the first industrialists. This is not surprising. They possess capital and access to credit; they have business skills; they are used to taking risks; and they are close to the market and understand the nature of demand. The Marwaris, in addition, have always had a powerful support system within the community--a network of commercial contacts, hostels to accommodate them on their travels, credit and banking facilities, and an apprenticeship system which not only trained their young but also helped them to accumulate capital. To a lesser degree, this applies to other Indian trading castes. But the Marwaris score over other Bania castes because they appear to have a stronger stomach for taking risks. Many Marwaris made their fortunes during the First World War in extremely speculative forward trading. Marwaris can also be ruthless and will not stop at anything to stop a rival. Hence, their competitors fear (and admire) them.

#### ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

After World War I, industrialization in India picked up. G.D. Birla, Kasturbhai Lalbhai and others made huge trading profits during World War I, and reinvested them in setting up industries. Between 1913-38, our manufacturing output grew at 5.6 per cent a year, well ahead of the world average of 3.3 per cent. By 1947, industries' share doubled to 7.5 per cent of national output from 3.4 per cent. But it was not enough to transform our agricultural society. Modern industry employed only 2.5 million people out of 350 million. The chief villain was agriculture, which had remained stagnant, and you cannot create an industrial revolution without an agricultural surplus.

In 1947, when India became free, the nation's wealth still resided with the landed gentry. Talukdars and zamindars lorded over impoverished peasants. There were a few trading and industrial families to be sure. Some of them had even avidly supported Mahatma Gandhi and the freedom movement. But they were socially inferior to the large landlords. After independence, the new government took over the princely states, abolished zamindari, and decimated the feudal class. The industrial families thought that now their time had come. But their hopes were short lived because the socialist government shackled them with the most stifling controls and raised tax rates to extortionate levels. Hence, wealth did not shift from zamindars to the business class. It went to finance the public sector enterprises.

The middle and small landlords, meanwhile, were not destroyed (partly because land reforms were not fully implemented). When the 'green revolution' came in the late sixties, these farmers in Punjab, Haryana and west U.P. seized the opportunity. They got tractors, put tube-wells, imported Bihar labour, and no one grudged them their new wealth because it was earned through hard work and not from rents from peasants. The rent seekers were a new class of bureaucrats and politicians who were getting rich from the 'Licence Raj'. By the seventies, Indians started leaving in large numbers for the Middle East and a new monied class of Non-resident Indians (NRIs) came up who invested their gains in garish bungalows in Kerala and Punjab. Non-resident Indians, green revolution farmers and corrupt public officials became the source of 'new money'.

After independence, Jawaharlal Nehru and his planners sincerely attempted an industrial revolution through the agency of the state. They did not trust private entrepreneurs, so they made the state the entrepreneur. Not surprisingly, they failed and India is still paying a huge price. Instead, India experienced an agricultural revolution. Ironically, India now had an important pre-condition in place—an agricultural surplus—but the industrial revolution continued to elude it.

By the mid-1960s, it had become clear that Nehru's economic path was delivering neither growth nor equity. Shastri had done some fire-fighting, particularly in freeing agriculture, and he had tried to shift the tone towards the market. But he died before he could change the course. Hence, the country persisted on the wrong path in the seventies and eighties even when it knew that this policy was failing and the mixed economy was a dead end. In fact, Indira Gandhi's government became even more rigid, introduced more controls, and became bureaucratic and authoritarian. It nationalized banks, discouraged foreign investment, and placed more hurdles before domestic enterprises. Some East Asian countries, in the meantime, began to make a decisive break with the past, and adopted export-oriented policies that did not distort market prices. India's tragedy was not that it adopted the wrong economic model in the fifties, but that it did not reverse direction after 1965.

#### THE OLD COMPANIES ARE IN TRANSITION TODAY

Indian markets have become progressively competitive after the reforms. Even where new competition has not yet emerged, the old

entrepreneurs are worried that their businesses are under threat from potential rivals. For the first time companies are having to face tough choices about what products to make, for which markets and aimed at which customers. They are becoming strategic rather than opportunistic.

Hence, most of the older companies are in transition today. They are coping painfully with the problem of incompetent family members at the top. It is easy to get rid of an outside manager, but how do you get rid of a family member? You must either do what is right for the business or what is right for the family. Either way, you will end up with an unhappy family or a weak company. Because of competitive pressures it is beginning to dawn on Indian businessmen that superior companies are built by superior people, that the success of their company depends on their attitude towards men and women of high ability and advanced training. Almost every industrialist I come across says that his biggest challenge is to find men and women of ability to manage crucial positions in his company. This is a profound change in the Indian business world after the reforms.

Competitive markets are forcing other changes on companies. An important failing of Indian business has been its short-term focus. Hence, companies have invested too little on employees. The lack of attention to human capital begins with lack of attention to recruiting new employees. I recall that when Procter & Gamble used to recruit its trainees at the campuses of the Indian Institutes of Management, it competed mainly with foreign companies like Citibank, Lever Brothers, and Nestle for the best graduates. There were few Indian companies—Asian Paints was one of them—and they were impressive. Exactly the opposite situation prevailed in Japan, where foreign firms found it difficult to get the best graduates from top institutions, such as the University of Tokyo, because of fierce competition from Japanese companies and the prestige and rewards attached to working for a Japanese firm.

If the success of a firm rests on the quality of its managers, why do Indian companies not recruit from the best at the IIMs and IITs? Indian industrialists say that IIM and IIT graduates are not culturally suited for their businesses. If the products of the premier schools are culturally unsuited, the industrialists could have put in place in-take recruitment programmes from other colleges. Their solution to hiring is 'put a wanted ad'. Mukesh Ambani of Reliance recently expressed his allergy to the westernized, 'tie-wallah golf-playing' executive. The issue he should have addressed is why the best products of Indian

colleges are reluctant to join Indian companies and prefer foreign ones. The main reason is that the Indian business world is still largely feudal where the owner centralizes decisions. Some owners treat their employees no better than servants. Employees feel more respected in the professional environment of a foreign company. Hence, even when Indian companies are able to hire a good manager they are not able to retain him/her.

### INDIANS IN SILICON VALLEY

The inspiration for India's new economy is the 250,000 Indians now living in Silicon Valley (Vishwanathan 1999). With mellow sunshine, dry air and abundant plant life, this California valley is both a naturalist's dream and the technology capital of America. *Business Week* reported in December 1999 that a surprising and extraordinarily large number of new enterprises in Silicon Valley—25 per cent according to the article—were started by Indians. Many have had a huge success on the Nasdaq: K. B Chandrasekhar's \$200 million Exodus Communications carries 30 per cent of all Internet content hosting popular websites like Yahoo, Hotmail and Amazon. Suhas Patil's \$628 million Cirrus Logic makes chips. Ajay Shah's \$750 million Smart Modular Technologies makes memory chips and modules in four countries. Prakash Aggarwal's \$240 million Neomagic integrates memory and logic in a single chip—this makes the chips more powerful and gives him a 50 per cent share of the laptop graphics market. Vinod Gupta's 120 million Integrated Systems makes software for home appliances, while his wife Vinita's \$66 million Digital Link makes network equipment.

The legendary heroes and mentors to the young are the visionary masters of the worldwide web, 'serial entrepreneurs' and venture capitalists: Vinod Dham, father of the Pentium chip, now wants to revolutionize telecommunications. Founder of Silicon Spice, he says he will, 'do for telecom what Intel did for PCs'. He envisions a world where telecom, like water, is available on tap. There is thirty year old Sabeer Bhatia, who created Hotmail and sold it to Microsoft for \$400 million in 1998. He has started a new company that will 'do to e-commerce what Hotmail did to e-mail'. The portly Kanwal Rekhi who founded one of the first Indian companies in the valley, Excelan, and sold it to Novell for \$250 million, is now a venture capitalist and claims to have made a \$100 million from investing mainly in Indian ventures. Vinod Khosla originally founded Sun Microsystems and

he has a net worth over \$100 billion, placing him in the forty-fourth position on Forbes' list of the wealthiest Americans in 1999. Among the richest Indians in the US, however, is Ravi Deshpande, who sold his company Cascade Communications to Ascend for \$3.7 billion and promptly started a new multi-billion venture called Sycamore Networks to make network routers. Other 'serial entrepreneurs' are Prabhu Goel, who has started three high tech companies and is an investor in five others, and Purna Pareek, who sold his Java-based server, Apptivity for \$30 million in 1998. A hardware success is Hemant Kanakia, who sold his Torrent Network Technologies to telecom giant, Ericsson for \$450 million. Prakesh Bhalerao, a Ph.D. from MIT, has investments in thirty companies and is CEO of four companies, all of which he has housed in a single rented 15,000 square foot space. Finally, Bipin Shah, CEO of Invox Technologies is selling an innovative new chip to Motorola, Hyundai and others that could transform digital voice recording; he is also an angel investor in five other companies.

Almost all of these Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have followed the same script. They came to the US in the seventies and eighties as young engineering graduates—usually with a degree from one of the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology. They got a Ph.D. from an American university and worked in a high tech company for a few years before setting out on their own. Although 'their brains are in the Silicon Valley, their hearts are in India', in the words of *Business World*, and they are now beginning to finance Indian students in US universities and fund new start-ups in India and by Indians in the US. They formally came together in 1992 to form a network called The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), which has 1000 members today, divided into four chapters for the purpose of fostering entrepreneurship. The members meet regularly and examine business plans by young Indians. TiE has pledged \$7 million to the Center for Civil Society in India. Individually, members have contributed to their alma maters, mainly Indian Institutes of Technology. Venkatesh Shukla, CEO of WebByPhone, runs the 'Foundation of Excellence' and has funded 900 students in the past three years. Prabhu Goel and Kanwal Rekhi have committed to finance 15,000 students. Prabhu Goel had his chips designed at Noida, near Delhi. Vinod Dham sources his software from Bangalore for Silicon Chips. Murali Chirali does the same from Bangalore. K.B. Chandrasekhar has funded two high profile start-ups in Bangalore—Aztec Software and Gray Cell—and wants 'to create six world class entrepreneurs of India'. Dilip Sontakey of E-Z Data Inc in California is establishing a \$5 million IT township near his

home town, Nagpur, in Maharashtra, to create 500 hi-tech jobs. This is how Indians abroad are beginning to pay back.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to examine in this essay the changing world of the Indian business person. Prior to World War I, he was largely a trader. The settled political conditions and the coming of the railway in the nineteenth century provided a fillip to commerce, as the Marwaris and other Bania traders spread out to the remotest villages across the land. However, barring a few regions such as Gujarat, they did not enjoy a good image in the eyes of the people. They suffered from the same prejudice that traders have suffered in most societies since the beginning of exchange. After World War I the most successful traders invested in manufacturing, and as they became industrialists their image improved. Their extensive philanthropies and the support of a few to the Freedom Movement reinforced this image.

When independence came the business class thought that its time had finally come. But a socialist government, which was hostile to business and wished to control all aspects of its activity, quickly extinguished its dreams of glory. The lowest point was reached in the mid to late 1960s, when a number of government committees such as Hazari's and Dutt's condemned business houses as monopolists and other forms of low life. And they went into a shell for a generation. The few who thrived did so by manipulating the system to their advantage. They had no other option for market share was only won and lost in a bureaucrat's office. This nexus, however, lowered the image of the business class in the public eye.

In 1991 many of the socialist shackles went away with the beginning of the reforms, and the business houses thought their time had again come. Industry associations, especially the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), began to be esteemed and its leaders were socially lionised. Today, however, ten years after the reforms, the old business families are floundering in an increasingly competitive global economy. They have been replaced in public esteem by a new generation of younger, more technical entrepreneurs who have achieved success in the new information economy. The latter are different—they no longer come from the trading castes; they are better educated; they are more participative (less autocratic) in their management style; they are more willing to share their wealth through stock options; and they are less likely to bribe government officials (because they face fewer

regulatory hurdles) As entry barriers have also fallen, there has been a surge in entrepreneurship during the past decade.

At the same time, the middle class has grown explosively as the economic growth rate has risen in the past two decades. This middle class is different from the older middle class—its young want to get MBAs rather than work for the government. The older middle class thinks that only greed motivates them, but members of the new middle class believe that what drives them is achievement in the global economy. Whatever the motivation, the image of business has improved since the 1991 reforms.

The rapid growth in the middle class and simultaneous surge in entrepreneurship suggests a more prosperous future for the nation as a whole. More and more poor people, it seems, will be lifted into the middle class in the first quarter of this century. This will happen faster in the more rapidly growing states of the west and the south and regional disparity will grow. But as long as the economy continues to grow robustly for another two to three decades all boats will eventually rise.

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